

请别误会
这是
三国正和



Vol 5 Don't Tell Me This Is the True History of the Three Kingdoms!

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Translated by [asd398](#)

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Chapter 1: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (1)

TL: I'll complete the first part of volume 5 which ends just before the Battle of Guandu before I switch to my new schedule. I won't be able to check on things all the time so I can only update the menus and contents much later. Help me add new chapters to NU as well. NU works well enough most times but it fails now and then.

Yun Chang POV

Haa... I gave a long exhalation. It was a lot colder than before, I thought as I saw the freezing condensation before me.

The cool autumn days were past, and the refreshing breezes became chilling to the bone. I looked around and saw that tall mountains had replaced the vast plains from before.

"Hey, you girls in the carriage, is it cold inside?" I turned back and hollered to the carriage while I was riding a horse.

"No, it's comfortably warm." Gan Qing's voice came from the carriage. Her voice was soft, perhaps because the other 2 were asleep.

I must say, the green silk robe that Lord Cao Cao gave me was really useful in keeping warm. And it was because of that, that I gave it to Gan Qing, Mi Zhen and Hua Tuo so that they could keep warm in the carriage.

"Umm, is sister Guan not cold? You gave us your robe after all."

"Un, I'm alright." I said between shivers, "I've always dealt with the cold like this anyway."

I haven't had any easy days in my life and I'm used to it already. Though my body may be cold, this thin green robes are enough to keep my heart warm.

Xuan De.

Lord Cao Cao said that he was in Runan...

Un... I feel like we're not on the right route. General Xiahou Dun said that we should see a city very quickly. But I don't even think we will see a village in this sort of landscape.

"Wen Yuan, do you still have the map from Lord Xiahou Dun?"

"Ah, I'm looking at it now." I turned my head and saw that Wen Yuan was already looking at the map. She frowned, and seemed unused to reading a map, "The route from here to Runan is... We seem to have gone off track."

Eh?

"Let me see." I received the map and took a close look as I said so.

Indeed, the landmarks as displayed on the map in the area where we were supposed to be by now did not indicate that many mountain peaks and gorges. Perhaps we have indeed gone off track.

"Looks like I shouldn't have let my lord lead us..."

"Un? What's wrong with having Lord Lu Bu lead us?" I hurriedly asked as I saw Wen Yuan's face that looked like she had made a big mistake, and then looked at Lu Bu who was driving the carriage.

"To be honest, my lord has always been directionally challenged."

"What?!" How could Wen Yuan only just reveal something so critical at this time?! "Wen Yuan, if you know that Lord Lu Bu is directionally challenged, then why did you let her lead? Even if you feel bad about it, you should at least help guide her right?"

"I didn't think it would be like that. My lord (Lu Bu) has helped our lord (Liu Bei) point out the right direction many times before and she has always been correct all those times. And there was only 1 road for this journey so I didn't think we would go off track." Wen Yuan shook her head and slapped her face in helplessness, "Looks like my lord will get lost if it's just her alone who's leading huh..."

"..."

Hai~ Saying anything now is too late anyway.

"Lord Lu Bu!" I called out to Lu Bu who was leading us and saw from behind that Lu Bu had both arms on her reins and seemed to be seriously handling the horses.

"Lord Lu..."

"..." Feng Xian had closed her eyes and lowered her head while having a pensive look on, "... Hu.... Hu."

She's asleep?!

"Lord Lu Bu, Lord Lu Bu, wake up."

"... Un un? Have we reached already?"

"No way it's that fast." I withdrew my arms that I had used to shake Lu Bu's shoulders, "Lord Lu Bu, we're off track."

To prevent the 3 girls inside the carriage from panicking, I said so in a soft voice and told Lu Bu the truth before pointing out the route which we were supposed to follow as well as our approximate position on the map.

"Ah..." Lu Bu stretched her arms as she looked at the map, "I've gone off track again huh."

The way she said that makes it seem like it always happens. Shouldn't you be more aware of it in that case?

"I'm sorry, I fell asleep unwittingly." Lu Bu said between yawns, "I seem to get lost whenever I fall asleep."

The only one who will still move forward while asleep is just you, Lu Bu. And I can't believe she actually fell asleep with such chilly winds.

"But what do we do now? We've been travelling for 6 hours now, and it's getting dark so I'm afraid we can't return to our original route."

I was hoping to make it to big brother before they finally engaged in an all-out battle but now that we are going to be significantly delayed after going the wrong way, big brother might meet with some mishap on the frontlines...

"It's very troubling that we have gone the wrong way..." Wen Yuan, who had just caught up to us, said in a soft voice, "But there's another route and this route has several Passes along the way."

Passes huh? I looked on the map and saw that there was a road that weaved through the mountains and there were indeed 5-6 Passes along the way.

"From how it looks on the map, this route doesn't seem much longer than the original one," Wen Yuan continued her explanation, "But I'm afraid that replenishment of our supplies will depend on the generosity of the generals of each Pass."

"Supplies huh~ But the supplies sent to each Pass is a fixed amount. I doubt there will be that much extra resources to give to us." Feng Xian said as she stroked Red Hare who was in front of her chest, her eyes which looked ahead were terrifying but listless.

"Un... Our supplies should be good for about a week or so. It's still alright for us since we can just eat less but..." I looked back. "No matter what, we can't let them suffer along right?"

They aren't warriors after all so there are some hardships they should not be made to endure,

"That's right, we'll just have to eat less."

"Un, I'll give my share to Red Hare."

She doesn't forget about it even at this time huh. But I haven't fed Red Hare in a while so I'll give part of my share to Red Hare as well.

"Daa!~" All of a sudden, a savage, who wore very little and had dark skin, jumped out in

front.

Who is this?

Chapter 2: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (2)

Yun Chang POV

"Whether you lot up ahead are tourists or merchants, you'll have to hand over some money before~ getting~ through~" A man with tattoos in the Nanman style hopped over on 1 leg as he gyrated about.

(TL: Nanman is a region in south-west China that supposedly had dark-skinned tribes.)

"This is..." Highway robbery? I muttered under my breath as I hurriedly checked our surroundings.

"No need to check Lord Guan Yu. I'm afraid the surrounding mountains are filled with his men." Lu Bu said as she drew her double-sided halberd which she had kept on her horse, "Wen Yuan, protect the carriage."

"Yes, my lord." Wen Yuan turned and headed back toward the carriage and stood on guard with the few soldiers we had.

"Haha~ Don't put up a meaningless struggle," The man laughed maniacally, and switched legs as he continued hopping over, "Just hand over the money you got and save me the trouble." As he said so, he pulled out a large iron rod from behind him and swung it about before putting it on his shoulder. It was obvious that this barbarian was no ordinary fellow with that extraordinary strength of his.

"..." I swung my blade a few times and moved my horse from left to right to see if he would show any openings but I was surprised to see that he was not fazed at all and was fully concentrated on a single point.

I had been practicing an ultimate technique that would allow me to slice through anything completely but it seems like it won't work on this barbarian. Even if it did, I still have to think of the safety of those girls in the carriage. If anything untoward were to happen to them, I don't know how I can face big brother.

"All you good men ahead," And so, I had no choice but to drop some of my hostility and try and persuade them with words, "We are heading to join up with some relatives and left in a hurry so we did not bring any money."

"No money?" He looked about, and then stretched his head to look at the carriage behind and sank into thought.

I wasn't actually lying, the amount of money we had wasn't a lot to begin with and even if we did give it to them, I doubt it would be sufficient for them.

But really, to think that there are more robbers about because of these troubled times. Hai,

there's really no helping it, I muttered under my breath as I shook my head whilst waiting for the barbarian's response.

"Un..." The man had his head lowered and silently shook it, "That makes things troublesome..."

"..." Lu Bu, who was beside me, immediately showed full hostility and bloodlust in her eyes as she readied herself to charge forth any time when she heard this.

Is it impossible to get away... If that's the case, we can only do our best later. As I thought so, my grip on my blade tightened and I readied myself to charge forth as well.

"If that's the case, then there's no helping it."

Eh?

The barbarian shrugged, and whistled.

"Come on out brothers!" At this command, a whole horde of people began leaping and bounding out from the trees and cliffs with movements that were both smooth and swift.

"What is this situation..."

Lu Bu also frowned, unsure of how to deal with the sudden removal of hostilities.

Well, that went surprisingly well.

"You idiot!"

"Ouch! My lady, what are you doing this for!"

(TL: Lady here refers to wife.)

Just then, a young girl who wore similar clothing as the male barbarian ran over to him and roared at him, "We were supposed to have a nice honeymoon in the Central Plains but not only do you not have money, you even started robbing people without even checking if they have any at all, will you stop troubling people?"

While she scolded him, her hands weren't just by her side as she snatched the iron rod and swung it down on the man who hurriedly dodged and pleaded, "Don't be angry, my lady! Ahuina! Dongtuna! Don't just stand there, come and help your king!"

The 2 expressionless girls who had red lines drawn on their faces stood by the side of the male barbarian and just looked on with no intention of helping at all.

"We actually agree with what the lady has said."

"And if the king dies like that, Wuxi Cave's monarchy will end and everyone's lives will improve."

"You two! I'll kill you both when we get back!" The male barbarian scolded them but he had no room to consider anything else besides avoiding his lady. The troops that surrounded them did not admonish the two girls either and some were even snickering.

I looked at Lu Bu, who also looked at me, and we didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Umm..."

"Ah, I'm really sorry about interrupting your journey." Seeing that we had been left alone at the side for a long while now, the lady hurriedly ran over and bowed as she apologised, "My husband is always so slovenly and wanted to steal some money while we were on our honeymoon so we can have some fun. But to think he actually wanted to steal from the poor. We must seem like a joke."

"Ah, it's fine it's fine, just a misunderstanding." Before Lu Bu and I regained our senses, Wen Yuan had already caught up and began to speak with the lady, "But a honeymoon huh?"

"That's right, our king said that there are a lot of tasty foods in the north."

"Even though what he just wants to avoid the work in the Cave...."

"N, nonsense! I just trust Jinhuaisanjie, that's all!" The male barbarian protested.

Eh? Why has the atmosphere become so friendly and cordial now? They were just robbers before...

"Speaking of which, where were you all heading to?" The lady asked.

"Ah, we were heading toward Runan, but we took a wrong turn and have to go by a long way now and are unsure of how to make it to our destination."

Runan. The girl called Ahuina muttered.

"You just need to take a boat from the Yellow River. Runan is at the end of the River."

"Really!"

"Un, the Yellow River Crossing is a straight road ahead."

Yellow River Crossing...

"Since you're headed towards the end of the Yellow River, why don't you come with us?"

"Eh?" The sudden help was unexpected, and now that lady actually offered to go along with us?

"We were planning to return anyway and to do so, we need to take a boat from the Yellow River as well."

“Take it as penance for our king’s crimes.”

“Silly king.”

“Why is it always my fault in the end?! I’m the king!”

“I’m your lady!”

“I’m your subordinate!!”

“What’s so special about being my subordinate!”

They began arguing again.

After that, we learnt they were indeed from Nanman. The man was called Meng Huo while his lady was Zhurong Shi.

(TL: Obviously this meeting didn’t happen. Meng Huo is actually not a barbarian. Meng Huo led a barbarian rebellion against Shu Han and was eventually put down by Zhuge Liang. Ahuina and Dongtuna are probably transliterations of their actual names and are original fiction-only characters.)

Chapter 3: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (3)

Yun Chang POV

The road through the mountains was narrow but it was still decently wide enough for our caravan to pass through. However, due to large number of rocks and pot holes, we had to pass through slowly. It was a good thing that there was a stream that flowed alongside the road we took so we would never lack for water.

That should have been the case...

"Hai, I'm all sweaty from the long journey here from Xichuan~" The male barbarian named Meng Huo smiled as he stripped and leapt into the stream and began bathing. He then turned and called out to me, "Blade girl, why don't you come on in?"

I didn't want to see such an embarrassing sight and turned away and stopped the carriage since he had leapt in.

"I thank you for your kind intentions but men and women should not bathe together. Please go ahead."

"Eh~ So the people from the Central Plains still have such a rule huh? We just bathe together on our side."

Bathing together huh... I wouldn't mind if it was with big brother...

Un?! Wh, what am I thinking!

Could it be that because I haven't seen big brother for too long that I'm thinking of such shameless things? Un, i, it must be because of that.

"Come on in, my lady~ Ahuina too~"

"No way, that's too shameless." Lady Zhurong swiftly denied Meng Huo and continued on without paying him any more heed.

"Our king really doesn't know how to read the mood, how shameful."

"You don't actually need to wait for him. He'll follow along when he's done so let's continue on."

As they said so, Dongtuna and Ahuina did not pay any more heed to their king and followed behind the lady.

Un... Since they said so, we might as well continue on. I gestured to the carriage master as I thought so and bade him to continue.

I turned back and saw that Meng Huo was bathing carefreely, and bowed before continuing. Though we did continue, the pace slowed down as it was now Lady Zhurong who led the way.

Come to think of it, where were their soldiers? I wanted to ask but they could have their own customs so I didn't.

"Yun Chang, Yun Chang."

Un?

Wen Yuan was on alert as she looked at the barbarians in front and continued when she saw she had my attention, "Is it really alright to go with these people from Nanman? If they should attack us along the way, it will be difficult to defend ourselves."

"If they wanted to do something, they wouldn't need to ask so many questions or go along with us." Lu Bu said as she combed Red Hare's fur with a pleased expression as Red Hare gave very cute and endearing cries, "But if they really want to do something, we can't help it so it's best we just stay on guard so we can deal with whatever comes." As she said so, Lu Bu swung her halberd.

Un... Being on guard is fine, but—

"Though these barbarians may be robbers, the scent of blood on them is very thin, and I doubt they are the evil and violent sort. Though they are a bit strange."

"Yun Chang is too kind. You see the good in everyone."

"That's not it... Hai, never mind. In any case, let's not pick a fight unnecessarily."

The 2 looked at me and nodded. It was good to travel with more people after all.

"Blade girl~ It seems like there's a stone wall in front."

"A stone wall?" I looked ahead when I heard Lady Zhurong call out all of a sudden and saw an unnatural wall that was not too tall blocking our path.

Looks like we've reached the first Pass.

This Pass wasn't particularly big and was as large as the distance between the 2 mountains. The discoloured gate was shut tight and just above the gate was a tablet with [Dongling Pass] written on it in beautiful calligraphy. Above the tablet were several sentries standing watch silently.

"Blade girl, is this how Passes in the Central Plains look like?"

"Un, most Passes are like that. There are bigger and smaller ones but this one is a smaller one."

“Eh~ How are we going to get past this Pass? Do we have to climb it?” Meng Huo frowned and said in exasperation after he rushed over.

“How could that be? ...” I laughed but then stopped almost immediately when I realised that we still had to figure out how to cross it.

... In any case, we should speak with them first.

I looked at Wen Yuan who nodded in understanding and began to yell out, “Oi! Open up!”

The tower went silent for a while before a reply came, “Who goes there?!”

Seeing a man who wore a uniform unlike that of the ordinary troops, I took out my official seal and yelled back, “I am Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang, Marquis of Hanshou Village, and am on a journey to seek Imperial Uncle Liu Bei with the permission of the Imperial Chancellor!”

(TL: In the original, Guan Yu left the seal, and the title, behind when he left Cao Cao.)

“Do you have an exit permit?”

Exit permit?

My heart sank as I didn’t know I needed official documents. I looked at Lu Bu and Wen Yuan and they both shook their heads.

Un...

“We were in rush and did not receive any documents from the Imperial Chancellor. This journey is of paramount importance to us and any delays would be abhorrent. I seek the Administrator’s understanding in letting us pass., As I said so, Lu Bu was about to raise her halberd, but I hurriedly stopped her and shook my head.

No matter what, we must wait for the Administrator’s reply.

After a long while, the voice above continued. “I am but a mere petty official and I cannot make this decision. I ask the General to rest here for 4-6 hours whilst I send a courier on a fast horse to check if what the General has said is true and if so, I will let the General pass.”

No other way about it huh... There will be a delay but it’s better than having to fight our way through. If it’s just a few hours, it’s still fine...

“Brothers, take Dongling Pass!” Just as I was about to accept the condition, Meng Huo roared out.

And in an instant, shouts for blood came from both sides as a group of dark-skinned people leapt out and charged at the Pass.

“Kuh! Guan Yu! You actually had an ambush waiting! Soldiers, charge out! We’ll kill this Guan Yu!”

“ ... ”

The hope for crossing the Pass peacefully has just been shattered.

Chapter 4: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (4)

Yun Chang POV

"Meng Huo! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Eh? Crossing the Pass, what else?" Meng Huo answered a matter of factly at my question, as though he'd done nothing wrong.

"We could have passed peacefully, why did you ask you troops to attack?" Every one of them were far too nimble and scaled the walls that were several dozen meters tall like monkeys.

"Relax, blade girl." Meng Huo said as he patted my shoulder, "There's no need to waste time speaking with people at such a small Pass when we can just break through easily."

As he finished, Meng Huo did not wait for my reply and took a giant leap into the fray.

What kind of logic is this...

"Oi, Yun Chang!" Wen Yuan's call made me regain my senses, and I heard a loud clanging as the gates began to open up.

"Let's go, kill them all!" The guarding general yelled out and charged at me while the numerous troops behind him charged at the Nanman monkeys.

This is bad, it's clear that there are more than a hundred troops.

"Yun Chang, my lord, what do we do?"

"Un... We can only fight." Lu Bu said as she drew her halberd.

"But if we break through forcefully, it will trouble Lord Cao Cao to no end."

"Yun Chang, we don't have the leisure to worry about all that." Lu Bu said as she tucked Red Hare into her breastplate, "We were but Cao Cao's guests. Our primary concern now is to find Xuan De as soon as possible. Everything else can be left for later."

Hai! Why did things get like this!

"Wen Yuan, protect the girls at the back!"

"Got it!"

I slapped my horse and charged forth. It has been a while since I've done intense physical activity so it may not be appropriate but these people will serve as a good warm-up.

I swung and twirled my blade and charged at the Cao troops.

“Ha!”

Un?

Ding! A crisp sound rang out from the clash between weapons as a wave of bloodlust rushed at me.

I calmly looked over and met eyes with a moustached man who did not wear too much armour and used an unremarkable broadsword. Aura, heroism, nobility, domineering; this man had none of these.

It wasn't nice to say this, but if this man wore the uniforms of ordinary soldiers, and stood amongst them, nobody would be able to recognise that he was someone important.

“Ya!” In the next instant, he raised his sword as he prepared to slash down at me.

“...” I held my breath and dodged to back. I then twisted my body and slashed across his horse's front legs—

“Ah!!” Both horse and rider cried out as the man fell backwards. He got up and made to mount the horse but my blade was already at his neck.

“Kuh! I can't believe I lost in a single bout.” Though victory was decided, he still hadn't given up.

“General, all we want is to cross the Pass and have no intention of causing trouble.”

“No intention of causing trouble?” His eyes that had smaller pupils opened wide at my words, “Then why didn't you prepare your documents? Why did you set up an ambush?”

“That huh... It's due to misunderstanding and carelessness.” I moved my blade away from his neck as I said so.

“... Are you humiliating me?” Clearly, he did not understand why I removed my blade.

I slowly put my hands in front of my chest and saluted him as I said, “It is our fault that things have become like this. We did not want this to happen and we seek your forgiveness and understanding.”

“Quit acting.” He muttered and waved away my salute as he slowly got up and looked at the battlefield, “... Looks like it's mostly over huh.”

I turned and saw that the Nanman troops had overrun the Pass and suppressed the city troops. The carriage seemed to be safe and sound as well. As I looked more closely, I could see Lu Bu walking out with her halberd drenched with blood. Looks like the Pass has been completely taken.

Saying that it was mostly over was a correct assessment of the situation.

“Come on,” The man sat down as he said to me, “I don’t want to be a prisoner so do it quickly.”

“Hai~” Though we would be able to cross the Pass by breaking the city, I really feel like this has all been a big mess now that we have taken so many lives to do so, “You were merely being loyal and adhering to your duties and have done nothing wrong so I cannot kill you.”

“You think I’ll be grateful to you for this?”

“No,” I smiled bitterly to him, “We are the ones who will be grateful.”

“...” The man didn’t get it but he did not pursue the matter, “Hmph, forget it. If you won’t kill the prisoners then so be it. I’ll adhere to the decisions of the victor.”

As he finished, he stood up once more, sheathed his broadsword and made to leave without saying any further.

“Ah, may I ask what the name of the guarding general is?” I asked.

“I’m not the guarding general of this place. The name of the guarding general is Kong Xiu, he was transferred 2 days ago.”

The man did not turn back and only continued on. I thought he wouldn’t say anymore but after that, a few more words came out–

“I am a small time officer of the Great Han, Major Yu Jin, Yu Jin Yu Wen Zhe.”

(TL: Kong Xiu was the one Guan Yu killed in the original. Yu Jin would eventually clash with Guan Yu but not here.)

Chapter 5: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (5)

TL: Not really sure why but views completely cratered since a couple of chapters ago. Is this part really that boring?

Yun Chang POV

Dongling Pass was more or less under our control now, and by the time we had all entered the Pass, it was already nightfall and after some discussion, we all felt that it would be better to rest for the night.

And the girls who had been sitting inside the carriage could finally come out, stretch and have some fresh air.

"Girls, you can come out now." We brought the carriage to the residence of the guarding general and though it was not very luxurious, it was still well stocked and furnished, and was thus more than comfortable enough for a night's stay.

"Un," Gan Qing replied as she parted the curtains and carefully stepped down the carriage before turning and helping Mi Zhen down, "Come, little sister."

"Un~" Mi Zhen said as she poked her tiny head out. She seemed to have just awoken as she was rubbing her eyes. Gan Qing then carried Mi Zhen down.

"Lord Guan Yu, we really have troubled you all quite a bit." Hua Tuo said as she came down and tidied her clothes with a difficult expression, "Ever since the time I left the Yellow Turbans till now, I've always been quite the burden."

"No such thing," I said as I rubbed Hua Tuo's head, "We're all big brother's companions. No one is a burden."

I've always felt that big brother had good judgement of things and people. So since big brother felt that we should keep Hua Tuo with us, then it must be the right decision.

In any case, Hua Tuo's medical techniques are indeed top notch.

"Un, that is indeed good." Hua Tuo nodded, and looked relieved, "If you should get injured, I'll definitely treat you immediately."

"We're all still fine. You should go and treat the Nanman troops. They're all still so lively and energetic, as if they aren't injured at all."

I looked at the Nanman troops who were chatting in their own tongue. Every one of them had rather large wounds but they were still chatting as though it didn't bother them at all.

"Yun Chang, we've gathered all the surrendered troops, how should we deal with them?"

Just then, Wen Yuan walked over from behind. She had taken off her armour by now, and seemed relaxed.

That's right, there were many troops left, along with 2 major-generals and several other mid-ranking officers. Right now, the number of surrendered troops numbered almost 1,000 or so.

"We should use them and have them cross the Yellow River with us." Lu Bu said as she came over, looking the same as before, except that Red Hare was now poking out between her breasts.

"It was an injustice to have broken into the city and killed so many. How could we still appropriate these troops for our own?" I said as I shook my head and looked at the Cao army troops, "Moreover, most of their hometowns are deep within Cao Cao's territories and they will thus be fiercely loyal and grateful to her. Even if we do appropriate them, they won't serve us loyally."

"Then what do we do? We can't just kill them all right?"

(TL: This actually does happen. In the movie The Warlords (in Qing dynasty though), for example, they tricked a city into surrendering with the promise of feeding the surrendered troops but they ended up slaughtering them instead.)

"Of course not..." I smiled bitterly and thought for a bit before Zi came up with a decent suggestion, "No matter what, we need to leave this city as soon as possible so we can just leave this city to the major-generals."

"Eh? We're just returning the city after taking it?"

"We shouldn't have taken this city in the first place..." I sighed, but there was no point to raise this issue any further.

Come to think of it, where is Meng Huo and the rest? After we entered the city, they had quickly disappeared. It would be good if they hadn't caused more trouble.

"Oi~ Blade girl~"

Un? I turned back and saw that it was the barbarians I'd been looking for.

Looks like... Good, looks like they haven't done anything untoward.

"Where have you all been? You all disappeared once we entered the city."

"Ah, we were just touring the place. It's surprisingly big for a small Pass."

I only realised it when they mentioned it. This small mountain Pass had quite a lot of residents and there were rows and rows of houses, making it seem like a county.

Apart from some farmers, most of the residents in a Pass would be the families of the

garrison troops but it was obvious that the majority of the residents in Dongling Pass were neither of these.

Looks like Cao Cao has been governing well, for a small Pass to be this populated,

“The Central Plains really are the best.”

“Un?”

Just then, Meng Huo who had been looking about with a carefree expression began to speak seriously.

“Perhaps you don’t think this is much, but for people like us who stay in the wetlands and the forests, seeing this level of civilisation is very inspiring.”

“What do you all stay in where you live?”

“Un? What we stay in huh, we mostly stay in straw houses or caves. If we were to stay in houses like you do in the Central Plains, they would definitely flood.” Lady Zhurong said in exasperation as she folded her hands across her chest, “You all have more than enough water and food for everyone yet why is it that you must still fight with each other?”

“Eh?”

Lady Zhurong did not continue any further and the others had heavy expressions. I was going to ask further but Lady Zhurong excused herself and brought the other 2 girls along with her up the city tower.

My heart was in turmoil after Lady Zhurong left. From what I knew, wetlands and swamps covered most of Nanman, making it difficult to procure fresh water and farm. To them, us Central Plain people must appear to be very fortunate.

But what about us? Do we treasure the lives we have now? We could clearly live in peace and prosperity in the Central Plains, yet why do we raise armies and fight amongst ourselves?

Lady Zhurong and the rest of the Nanman people couldn’t understand this and I, who was a resident of the Central Plains, could not give an answer either.

“...”

“Ah, blade girl, don’t need to mind it that much.” Meng Huo, who remained behind, smiled as he looked at the distant Lady Zhurong and roughly patted my back, “My lady is a straightforward person so she says what she thinks. But I know that whether it’s the Central Plains or the Nanman, every place has their issues.”

“Un...”

“Alright, stop brooding about it. Why not think about the potential problems that lie ahead

of us?” Meng Huo said as he made to follow Lady Zhurong, “I’ll go enjoy the scenery with my lady and set up camp in the city. Just let us know when you’re leaving.”

“Ah... Un, got it.” I hurriedly replied and bowed.

What he said was right. I have enough to deal with as is.

“Yun Chang, why are you still here?”

“Ah, Wen Yuan. Is your side all done!”

“Un, the general’s residence is pretty good and we’re all set up.” Wen Yuan said as she sighed, “When do we leave?”

“As soon as possible, at first light tomorrow.”

“Un, alright.”

We did not speak any further and returned to the general’s residence.

“Come to think of it, does Wen Yuan know what’s the next checkpoint?”

“Ah, the next checkpoint is... Ah, if I remember correctly, it’s—”

— Luoyang

Chapter 6: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (1)

TL: This was supposed to be the last daily chapter but my start date got delayed for another week so yay for all of us. Battle of Guandu all the way now. By the way, thanks for your thoughts in the comments in the previous chapter. This series has an awful lot of set-up between stages though. After Guandu, there will be quite a lot of plot, intrigue and set-up before action happens again in Jing state.

In Luoyang...

"I heard that Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang took over Dongling Pass. They should be here in a couple of days."

"Eh... What do we do... There's only me and you in Luoyang city. Even if we have over 10,000 men, how do we resist them?"

"Meng Tan, aren't you paying too much heed to those rumours?"

"Han Fu, you may not know, but my reliable source from Dongling Pass said that Guan Yu doesn't just have a few dozen guards. She has an innumerable army of barbarians who overwhelmed Dongling Pass in less than an hour."

(TL: Different Han Fu. This Han Fu is 韩福 while the one that died is 韩馥.)

"Damn it! What is Lord Cao Cao doing when something so drastic is happening here!"

"Lord Cao Cao is having a hard time at the frontlines... How will she possibly have time to worry about things here..."

"... Hai... Looks like we can only depend on ourselves. Issue these orders! Secure the city and stockpile supplies!"

Meng De POV

"Eh! We got stalled yet again! We finally stopped a caravan but it got away!"

"Sis, at least you found a caravan. I lay in wait with my side for an entire day and didn't even see a caravan."

I was engrossed with the Art of War when the Xiahou sisters came in unhappily. Yuan Rang had a look of frustration on her while Miao Cai's smile didn't seem natural like usual and seemed a little tired.

"What's wrong, Yuan Rang, Miao Cai?" Though I could guess what kind of trouble they met with, I still asked anyway.

“Yuan Shao’s supply line, what else~” Miao Cai drawled.

Right, Ben Chu’s supply line.

I don’t know what happened, but Ben Chu seems have changed the way she does things quite a bit recently. Not only have the routes which her supply caravans change constantly, they even take some off-road routes. If this goes on, we won’t be able to win the battle of attrition.

Not just that, even if we do clash head-on, Yuan Shao doesn’t just move in without thinking. Her troops will probe for a bit, and then withdraw. In a conventional battle of attrition, our side which has less troops and supplies will be on the losing end.

If this goes on...

“Report! 10,000 Yuan troops are headed for us!”

“What!” Yuan Rang exclaimed at the news which the military courier delivered as he charged into the tent.

Ben Chu, is this a show of your power...

Ke~ I guess I’ll play along.

“Yuan Rang, relay the order. I’ll go out and meet Yuan Shao personally.” I said as I took my plate armour off the rack, “Miao Cao, return to Yingchuan. I don’t want to play a game of whack-a-mole with Ben Chu.”

“”Yes!”” The 2 swiftly left the tent after acknowledging the order,

Come to think of it, Yuan Rang and Miao Cai have always done a lot for me since young... I cannot let down their trust in me.

“Xun Yu, Cheng Yu, are you both there?”

“... Yes.” “... What orders does Imperial Chancellor have for us?”

They’re in the tent as expected huh.

“Have you convinced the people I told you to convince the last time?”

“We got a chance to speak with Liu Pi and Gong Du when they fought with Cao Ren, so it should work.” “Just...”

“Just... Zhang Xiu huh?”

I’d already guessed it.

It’s understandable that Zhang Xiu is still refusing to surrender.

"I'll speak with Zhang Xiu personally when I return." I exited the tent as I finished.

(TI: Liu Pi is supposed to be Yuan Shao's subordinate, and then later on Liu Bei. So is Gong Du. They never betrayed Yuan Shao. If anything, this proves that having too much knowledge of the Three Kingdoms would have made it even worse.)

Yuan Shao's troops were numerous. I only had 40,000 troops while Yuan Shao had 100,000. And today, Yuan Shao has not deployed all of them. 2 forces were headed for us, and they totalled about 2-30,000.

Another probe again? Or does she want to fight me with the same numbers as I have?

"Imperial Chancellor, the enemy general has begun to charge at us."

"One of them is Gao Lan! The other one was formerly Han Fu's subordinate general!"

Zhang He huh? Those 2 aren't to be trifled with,

"Yue Jin, Li Dian!"

"Your generals are here!"

"Go and meet those 2 on the battlefield."

The 2 acknowledged the order and galloped off on their horses, and very quickly met with the other side in combat. Yue Jin and Li Dian were still able to fight the generals on the other side on even ground in the beginning but Yue Jin was quickly being overpowered by Gao Lan.

"Ha!!" Gao Lan gave a thunderous roar which could be heard by the entire army and slashed down viciously.

"!" Yue Jin did her best to block it but just the wind alone from the attack blew away her straw hat and revealed a very difficult expression on Yue Jin's usually calm face. The spear which she used to block the broadsword slowly inched down toward her head,

"Ya!"

"Kuh..." Yue Jin's precarious predicament was distracting Li Dian, who was also having a hard time.

This was bad.

"Tell those 2 to withdraw immediately and return to base. Yuan Rang, Cao Hong, you both are to lead a 5,000 force each and launch a surprise attack on the enemy on opposing sides."

"Yes!" After they acknowledged the order, 2 groups of troops left the main body from left and right and began their attack. Yue Jin and Li Dian were able to use this distraction and

escape unscathed.

Sou *Sou* *Sou*!

“Un?!”

“They’ve loosed arrows at us! Defensive maneuvers, now!” Yuan Rang who was ahead yelled out before I could react as a flurry of black arrows rained down on her troops. Just looking from afar, one could tell that the losses would be significant.

“I didn’t think that Yuan Shao still has so much arrows left...”

Hai! I knew I shouldn’t have attacked first.

“Imperial Chancellor, let me go.” Hu Chi seemed restless and asked me for orders, “My troops are quick and we can definitely break through.”

But...

“... Sound the drums, we are retreating.”

“Eh?” Hu Chi was baffled, “But, if we retreat just like that, our losses would have been...”

“If we keep on fighting, we will suffer even greater losses,” I waved my hands as I said so and the drummers began to sound the retreat signal, “And I didn’t plan on winning this battle to begin with.”

“Eh?” Hu Chi was still as baffled as before.

“Want to have a bet with me, Hu Chi?”

“What are we betting on?”

“When we return to our encampment, we will have a lot more supply caravans.”

Chapter 7: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (2)

Liu Bei POV

"M, my lord, Gao Gan's supplies have been stolen by the remnants of the Yellow Turbans, Zhang Pi and Gong Du." Feng Ji stammered as her forehead glistened with sweat.

"Hmph! This must be the doings of Cao Cao."

Ben Chu slammed the table, but did not raise her lowered head.

"Cao Cao must have sent her subordinates to convince these Yellow Turban remnants. The western parts of Ji state have begun to show signs of rebellion as well."

"Un... Let Gan Lan quell them."

"No, my lord, we cannot suppress any rebellion at this time with force." Just then, Tian Feng stood up. Ju Shou, who sat beside her, was frantically pulling on Tian Feng's sleeves but Tian Feng flung away Ju Shou's hands and continued, "My lord, only by following the way of the kings can one hope to rule the world. Now that we are locked in mortal combat with an enemy, and are faced with a potential rebellion back home, we must act as benevolent rulers and appease the people where possible."

"Shut it, who are you to alter our lord's orders?" Shen Pei who had been hiding behind Feng Ji perked up, "Now that our enemy is at our doorstep, how are we supposed to convince the rebels who will see this as a prime opportunity?"

She spoke loudly, but she still hid behind Feng Ji.

"Speaking of which, the routes by which the supply caravans were to take were all decided by you, Tian Feng. You yourself said that it would be perfect and no caravans would be lost. How come they were so easily stolen away now huh?"

"The route from Bing state to here is long. I had instructed the caravans to slow down, disguise themselves and take off-road routes to avoid Cao Cao. This should have slowed them down such that the journey should take twice as long." Tian Feng stared at Feng Ji as she said so, making Feng Ji jump, "If they did as I said, General Gao Gan should have only reached 10 days later, yet he is already here. Has Feng Ji Feng Yuan Tu done something?"

"N, nonsense!"

"Yuan Hao, that's enough." Ju Shou said as she pulled Tian Feng aside, "What's important now is how we deal with Cao Cao. There's no point for you to argue with Feng Ji here."

"Stop pulling me, Ju Shou!"

"This..."

Tian Feng flung Ju Shou's hands away again and saluted Yuan Shao before leaving.

Just then, I looked at Yuan Shao and saw that while she looked calm, she held her head with one hand and her eyes were half-closed.

From just now till now, Ben Chu had not said anything.

And now, she sighed once more before she spoke up, "Ju Shou, what do you think is the appropriate response to Ji state's rebellion?"

"Eh?" Ju Shou was at a loss at the sudden question that came her way, "Ah, your retainer feels that using negotiations first would be for the best."

She was very careful with her words. Even though Ju Shou and Tian Feng were the same type of person, Ju Shou was clearly a lot more tactful.

"Un..." Ben Chu sank into thought, "Ju Shou, go with Gao Lan and try to persuade them first. Let them give their conditions, and if they can't be appeased, have Gao Lan mobilise troops from the neighbouring cities and quell them."

Ben Chu finished and got up and retreated to the back of the tent without waiting for a reply.

...

Silence filled the tent.

"... Feng Ji, did you tell Gao Gan to hasten the delivery?"

And now that Ben Chu was gone, Ju Shou carefully raised the topic that led to Tian Feng's departure.

At this, regret filled Feng Ji's face. It was obvious what the answer was. "I won't hide it, I found that our supplies were very low 2 days ago when I did a stock check so I wanted to have more supplies so that the troops could be more at ease."

"Un... How much do we still have?"

"Less than 2 weeks' worth." Shen Pei said as she poked her head out.

"What about Wu Chao?"

"We can't casually use the supplies in Wu Chao. The supplies there aren't for the purpose of outlasting a battle of attrition." Feng Ji said as she shook her head, "The supplies there were prepared for our advance on Xuchang after we win at Guandu. Unless things get truly dire, I won't permit use of the supplies at Wu Chao."

"..."

Nobody said anything in response. As for me, I didn't have any right to speak, and could only watch on as I felt worried for them. I'd thought they would have more to say but everyone soon dispersed. Each one of them had different expressions, but none were hopeful.

"My lord, is the meeting over?"

"Un, though I just stood there and listened." I said as I smiled bitterly at Zi Long. She understood what I meant and didn't ask any further.

"... It doesn't seem too optimistic for Yuan Shao." Gong You said tiredly as she squinted, "There are problems between the key decision-makers, supplies are not being delivered, and management is generally messy. One wrong decision or mistake can decide the outcome of this war."

It's like that as expected huh...

How should I put it? At times like this, I feel the weight of history. No matter how many things I change, or not at all, I just can't change the course of history. And the outcome of the Battle of Guandu appears to be a critical component of history and I feel like whether I interfere or not, the outcome has already been decided and Ben Chu will lose and die of illness while Meng De will unify the north.

But what kind of prank by history is this? To have 2 good friends fight each other to the death?

"Meng De, Ben Chu... Have they both changed..."

Eh?

"Zi Long, was it you who was speaking just now?"

"Un, no, what's wrong?"

"Eh? Then was it Gong You?"

"... I believe I speak very little."

Un, I know. Then...

"Ah~"

Just then, a coquettish voice could be heard from in front of me, and I felt like I knocked into something at my stomach. The feeling was slight, but I was sure that I had knocked into something.

I lowered my head and after concentrating for a while, I finally saw a figure.

"Eh!"

There was someone here?! I clearly didn't see anyone coming at me before!

As I thought so, I hurriedly took a few steps back. And only now did the 2 people by my side see the person in front of me.

"Ah! I, I'm sorry! I was thinking about something..."

A girl?

The short girl who was wearing white robes in front of me was frantically bowing and apologising. Her black hair was messy and several strands had blocked her vision.

"Ah, ah, it's alright." I shook my head, "Umm, may I ask who you are..."

I'd been in the camp for a while now but I never met this person before.

"Ah, I haven't introduced myself!" She seemed to have remembered that and slapped her head as she bowed, "I'm Xu You Xu Zi Yuan."

Chapter 8: Don't tell me this is a conversation with Xu You

Liu Bei POV

Honestly, I've always found it difficult to understand how Meng De and Ben Chu were able to stand out at such a young age and raise and command armies numbering tens of thousands.

I kept thinking about it the entire way back only to realise how foolish it was of me. Why am I applying common sense from the original history to this Three Kingdoms which is significantly different?

And so, I gave up trying to think about it after that.

Because my side was considered an outsider, our encampment was at a middle-outer region of Liyang. Just walking over from the canteen took close to an hour.

As I brought dinner back, I brought Xu You's portion as well apart from my own portion.

"Here, Xu You."

"Ah, thanks Imperial Uncle." Xu You respectfully received her dinner and seemed a little shy.

It may be a bit strange but Xu You is currently in our encampment.

Xu You was petite but she had a good figure. Her hair was messy but she still wore an official hat and a hairpin on her head. She looked like she was asleep, and seemed exhausted and devoid of strength. Xu You doesn't look old from her figure or looks but she said that she was already 25. She's probably one of the oldest people I've met thus far.

"Umm," Just then, Xu You set down her bowl, tidied her clothing and sat up before saying to me, "I am really thankful to Imperial Uncle. If it weren't for Imperial Uncle, I would not have the good fortune of being able to eat today's dinner."

"Ah, it's alright, you're being too polite." I smiled as I waved my hands, "You have your own troubles after all."

That's right, Xu You hasn't eaten in days now.

I do go and get food everyday but the soldiers can't seem to see me so they always just stand in front of me, Xu You had told me earlier before.

And it seems like she had just gone out to get dinner so I went with the flow of things and invited her here so that she could have dinner with us. By the way, Zi Long and Gong You have already eaten and are now doing their own things. They had offered to help me take dinner but it still feels weird to have others take care of me so I turned down their offer.

"But Xu You, even if your existence is a bit weak, it can't be to the level where you can't get

food right. And even if so, you could have gotten help from your own guards.”

“... No, one’s own things must be done by oneself.” Xu You shook her head at my words, “When I was an official in Luoyang, times were tough and I got used to it then.”

“Un? Life in Luoyang was tough?”

“It was alright at first but after the previous Emperor (Ling of Han) assumed the throne, the eunuchs began to abuse their power and many officials were accused of corruption and locked away. To prevent such false allegations, we could only live austere.”

“I never knew...”

“Of course, it doesn’t seem so bad once you get used to it.” At my surprise, she only smiled and began to devour the not-so-tasty food.

I began to feel respect for Xu You as I quietly looked at her.

In my impression, Xu You was only a traitor who leaked vital information. No matter how good of a strategist she was, the only thing that came to mind was that.

(TL: Xu You is supposed to be greedy and is the one who leaked the information about Wu Chao to Cao Cao.)

But it was clear that this Xu You here wasn’t like that.

“Hai...” Xu You sighed and set down her bowl.

“Un? What’s the matter?”

“No, nothing.” She shook her head weakly. She wanted to show that it was alright but her brows were still locked in a tight frown.

Have they really changed?

I remember hearing these words before, and if I’m not wrong, it was Xu You who said them. Her source of troubles was probably this.

“You said you were an official in Luoyang before?”

“Ah, un. It was Emperor Ling’s administration then, and I held a position in Court.” Xu You said as she took a sip of soup, “Back then Meng De had just been appointed Captain of the Cavalry and Ben Chu had been transferred to the capital from the north due to her prestige. We knew each other from then.”

Hou~ So they had that sort of history huh. I didn’t think they would know each other from so far back.

“That must have been quite a few years now.”

“Un, Meng De and Ben Chu were just 12-13 then but they already felt different from everyone else and were key characters that people in the Court paid attention to.”

As she spoke, respect appeared on Xu You’s face and in her eyes, I could see the recollections she was having.

“Looks like you really respect them huh.” I said, and she laughed.

“Un, I do.” Xu You nodded vigorously, “They hold a very special position in my heart. Though they are younger than me, I’ll never achieve the same stature that Meng De and Ben Chu already have.”

She stopped and closed her eyes as she said so, “But, I would very much like it if I could just walk beside them as equals once more.”

“As equals... Huh.” I felt despondent just repeating Xu You’s words. I didn’t fully understand what she meant by that but I did understand how she felt.

Ambition.

The lofty ambitions of both Meng De and Ben Chu are what makes Xu You feel she cannot match up to them.

“Then why did you join Ben Chu and not Meng De?” I regretted what I said almost immediately.

In history, Xu You eventually joined Cao Cao. If it turns out that, history progresses along this thread because of these words of mine, then wouldn’t it be unfair to Ben Chu?

Just as I was thinking about this, Xu You burst into laughter, “Kekeke...”

She went on for a while and only stopped after seeing my bewildered look, “Ah, sorry, sorry, I just thought of something Ben Chu always said to me.”

“Eh?”

“Ben Chu is always a little lacking compared to Meng De,” She smiled as she said so, “So Ben Chu will always say to me, ‘Zi Yuan, come prank Meng De with me! Let’s see if she can still be so brazen after that!’”

“Eh~”

“Very childish of her right? Though they were always fighting then, they supported each other in secret quite a bit.” Xu You was smiling just as before, but now her smile was beginning to be filled with warmth.

Thereafter, I chatted with Xu You about Meng De and Ben Chu and talked about how they helped and cared about each other. We chatted until the sky was completely dark and I stopped her when she looked tired and got her to rest for the night.

That night, I had a dream. In that dream, Meng De, Ben Chu and Xu You were talking and laughing as they walked side by side with no gap between them at all.

Chapter 9: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (3)

"Haa~" I yawned and stretched my back as I tiredly put on my clothes. It's been a while since I've transferred to this era but I'm still not adept at putting on the clothes of this era.

The light from the morning sun shone through the tent that was made from coarse cloth and showed the particles in the air. I couldn't avoid breathing them in, but the air here still felt a lot fresher than what I was used to in the future.

Compared to before when I was just muddling along comfortably in life, just getting up was laborious and time-consuming now. Ever since I've come here, that indescribable tension has become a constant feature in my life.

Zi Long was the same as I was but Gong You always slept very well. Perhaps this is the effect of sleeping early and regularly.

"Umm... Umm..."

Un?

Just as I was deep in my thoughts, I felt something pull my clothing and when I looked over, I saw that it was Xu You who had stayed over in our encampment.

Her sudden appearance gave me quite the shock.

"Ah, ah, good morning, Lord Xu You." I hurriedly gave a greeting, at which the small face bowed.

"Many thanks to Lord Liu Bei for offering me shelter," Xu You said with some embarrassment, "I can't believe I spoke so long and didn't notice that curfew was already past."

"Ah, it's fine it's fine. Ben Chu was the one who gave us this space after all, so it's us who should be thanking you."

"No such thing..." Xu You shook her head with a smile, before stopping all of a sudden, and then continued, "I really am grateful to Lord Liu Bei."

"Un?"

"Ever since you came, I feel like Ben Chu is a lot more... Approachable than before."

Approachable? I didn't get it at first but then I soon understood after a moment's thought.

Actually Ben Chu is the one who wants to be intimate with you all. She just doesn't know how to express herself.

That was what I thought but I didn't say it. Some things are meant to be said by the person

herself after all.

“Umm, it’s getting late, and I should be at the meeting room with the others for a discussion soon.” Xu You said as she bowed and got up.

When I looked at Xu You, I felt that I should say something.

“Xu You!”

“Eh?”

I called out to Xu You and slowly turned my thoughts into words, “Don’t just follow the current. It may only be something small, but you should say what you think.”

Perhaps this is the only way to enhance one’s value.

Xu You looked at me, and she was smiling as always, but her smile this time was very meaningful. Finally she nodded, “Though I may be easily forgotten, I have decided to do some of the things only I can do.”

Sunlight momentarily poured in through the open curtains and soon stopped after the curtains closed once more.

I heaved a sigh of relief after Xu You left. Though Xu You doesn’t seem like a very impressive person, I don’t want to treat her like someone who deserves pity as Xu You is probably someone with great potential.

“Xuan De!”

“Ah?!” Just as I was deep in thought with my eyes closed, a shrill cry interrupted me.

I opened my eyes to see a beautiful face just centimeters away from mine. Beneath that face, her clothing which seemed like it was lined with gold gleamed in the meagre light in the tent.

“Ben, Ben Chu? What is it that you have come so early for...”

“I didn’t have a good sleep at all last night as I’ve been thinking about Tian Feng and Feng Ji!” Ben Chu said as she shook me by my shoulders, but this wasn’t helping me to understand why she came here.

I grasped her arms and tried to get her to calm down, “Umm, Ben Chu. So what is it that made you come here so early in the morning?” As I said so, I scooted over and gestured for Ben Chu to take a seat before saying any further.

“I was talking about Tian Feng and Feng Ji. Why can’t they get along?” Ben Chu said as she sat down heavily, her breasts jiggling as she did so; and crossed her legs and sighed as she supported her chin.

So that's what she's troubled about? I'd thought that Ben Chu wasn't too bothered seeing as she looked the way she usually did yesterday. But it looks like she kept it inside her.

"How should I put it? I don't think this problem can be solved."

"Eh? Can't be solved?"

"Un, if you really want to do something about it, then it's you, Ben Chu, who needs to change." I nodded and continued when I saw a look of puzzlement on Ben Chu, "As I said before, you have to be truly intimate with them."

"Intimate... Huh." Ben Chu sank into thought, probably about how she could go about being intimate with her subordinates, and then her cheeks reddened as she slowly muttered, "Why do I always have to do this..."

"As I said... If you really want to resolve the differences between your retainers, you must understand them as one of them." I smiled as I poked her forehead, "But the little girl who just left does think that you are more approachable than before."

"Un? Did someone just leave?"

... Ah. When Ben Chu said this, I recalled what Xu You said yesterday.

She can't see me anymore,...

If Ben Chu were to return to how she was before, perhaps...

"Ben Chu, you may have neglected her all this while, but there is someone who has always been by your side."

"Eh?"

"She spoke to me about a lot of things about your past, and let me know about a different you," I said as I looked at Ben Chu, "If you were to return to how you were before, perhaps you might be able to be intimate with everyone."

"Who is..." Ben Chu sank into deep thought and thought of who it was instantly.

And just then, a shout came from outside the tent—

"Xu You has betrayed us!!"

Chapter 10: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (4)

Meng De POV

"Meng De, we managed to grab 4 supply caravans this time! This should be more than enough to last us for 3 months!"

I was now sitting in my tent which I had been living in for a long while now and sipping tea as I listened to Yuan Rang's excited voice. Though the tea was brought from Xuchang, it didn't taste as good as when I drank it in Xuchang.

"One-eyed girl, that may be so, but if we keep this up, we'll be on the losing end." This wasn't me, but Feng Xiao who called Yuan Rang by her nickname, and covered her mouth as she continued, "We may have the supplies, but we don't have the troops. The best way forward is to burn down their main supply cache and force them to retreat. If we stay hot on their heels, we should be able to eke out a win."

"But the righteous side is us, why should we fear Yuan Shao?" Xu Huang said with a ferocious look in her eyes. Just her bloodlust alone was enough to make Yue Jin who sat beside her lean onto Li Dian.

"Xu, Xu Huang, those words of yours are only worth 50 marks." Though she was visibly shaken, Yue Jin still gave her opinion, "Even if righteousness is not on our side, we will still attain victory. Right, Man Cheng?"

Yue Jin asked Li Dian, hoping to get a supportive opinion but Li Dian only stood there in a daze with a book in her hands for a long while before she replied, "Wen Qian, I think that before we are generals, we are warriors. So instead of thinking about such things, we should probably think about how we can improve our martial arts. We were both beaten black and blue by Gao Lan and Zhang He the last time after all."

"That is... Another matter altogether." Yue Jin blushed in embarrassment as Li Dian touched on her pain point and turned her face away.

Seeing that they had stopped talking, I felt that I should say something.

And so, I set down my tea cup.

"Alright alright. We are at a steep disadvantage and so any amount of small schemes won't help. As Feng Xiao said, we must force Yuan Shao to retreat." I looked at Feng Xiao, and saw that she had a look of irritation, probably because she could guess what I was about to say next. I laughed inside and continued, "That said, the Yuan army camps are over 1,000 and there are dozens alone just nearby Guandu even if we discount Liyang. Some are obvious, some are hidden, and so it will be difficult to find the supply cache, so that cannot be our main plan—"

"Oh? Then the Imperial Chancellor must have come up with something else then?" Before I could finish, Feng Xiao spoke up, probably displeased with what I said.

“Un, that huh~” I closed my eyes before opening them again and sweeping through everyone’s faces, “Not really~”

“Hey! Meng De! How can you still be in the mood to joke with us huh~”

“I just wanted to let everyone relax, Yuan Rang.” I looked over at Feng Xiao as I said so and when our eyes met, she turned away.

I’d thought she wouldn’t speak but she did so after sighing, “I believe the Imperial Chancellor has some business to attend to. Why don’t you go and deal with that instead of wasting time here?”

“Geh...”

“Un? The Imperial Chancellor has business to attend to?”

“Ah, un. Yes...” I said, trying my best to hide my emotions.

I looked at Feng Xiao again and found that she wasn’t even looking at me anymore. That fellow, how much does she actually know. It feels like nothing I do escapes her...

I involuntarily shuddered and escaped the tent as I mounted a fast horse and left the encampment.

I started cultivating an interest of riding and camping in the mountains several years back. Even now, when I no longer have the time to camp, I still like to ride up the mountains and see the ravines, rivers and waterfalls.

At this moment, I was at the peak of an unnamed mountain. The slope wasn’t steep and so I was able to effortlessly lead my horse up.

If I said that I found this mountain by accident, that would be a lie. If I said that I ran out because I suddenly felt like seeing the scenery, that would be utter nonsense.

I’d searched for and found this mountain to be suitable a few days back. And the reason why I did so was purely to serve as a meeting point with a certain someone.

I tied the horse to a tree and walked towards the cliff and looked outside. What greeted me was the sight of Liyang city which wasn’t too far away.

Though it looks far, I still got goosebumps seeing the black tents covering the entire landscape. Fires were now being doused as it was morning, and columns of black smoke rose up to the sky.

Just then, a faint scent came. It was now winter and in the north, very few flowers bloomed in winter. Moreover, this mountain was barren.

The source of the scent was someone else.

“Has she reached?” I smiled and turned my head.

There wasn’t anything there, and the scenery I saw as I walked over remained untouched. Only after I looked closely did I see another horse tied beside mine.

“Stop hiding Xu Zi Yuan, aren’t we old friends~” I spread my arms wide, to show I had friendly intentions. I know what kind of person Zi Yuan is, how introverted she is, and I doubt she has changed much over the years.

“... Meng De.” A weak voice came from behind the trunk of a withered tree. I looked over and saw some clothing poking out from the sides.

“It’s been a while, Zi Yuan.”

“... It’s been a while.” Zi Yuan said as she poked her out and saw me. She sized me up for a bit before smiling.

“How is it? How has Ben Chu been treating you?”

“Un, still alright.” Zi Yuan had by now lowered her guard and came out from behind the tree. She still had the same expression as back then, a smile that was not born out of happiness.

“Umm...” I was about to speak up when she raised her hand. In that hand, she held a letter.

The letter I had sent to her anonymously.

“Did Meng De really send this letter?”

“Of course I did, how would you have seen me here if it wasn’t?”

“Un.” She sank into thought, and nodded, “I may have come now, but could it really go as you wrote in the letter...”

Kata *Kata*~

“Cao Meng De! You!” Along with the sound of horse hooves, an angry yell that sounded like a rich young miss could be heard, and not too far away, a girl with wavy hair wearing luxurious clothing was coming toward us as she held a sword in her hands.

My lips began to curl at this sight.

Chapter 11: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (5)

This mountain was particularly tall but staying long inevitably made it feel chilly.

I hugged my body and tried my best to keep the cold winds away but still involuntarily shivered when the cold winds blew.

Just then, the cloud passed and rays of sunshine shone down on the sword which reflected it and blinded those who saw it. One side of the blade reflected my face and the other, Ben Chu.

Ben Chu had dragged her thick and heavy luxurious robes across the floor as she now stood staring at me menacingly.

"It's a been a while, Ben Chu." I raised my hand and greeted her with no tension despite her animosity.

"Hmph!" She sighed disdainfully and looked at me, and then at the frantic Xu You before back at me, "You despicable fellow!"

"Ben, Ben Chu, that's not it..."

"Don't speak Zi Yuan!" Ben Chu roared angrily at Xu You who was so frightened she took several steps back and did not dare to speak.

"Come on Ben Chu. It's been so long since we last met. Why are you pointing a sword at me now that we have finally seen each other face to face?"

As I finished, I could feel an icy blade pressed against my throat, "You know why!"

"..." Cowardice had begun to fill my heart but I had no intention of backing off here.

"Meng De, it was supposed to be an upright battle between us but here you are doing sneaky, despicable acts." Ben Chu said as she trembled from anger, "You've incited rebellions in my lands, stolen my supplies and killed my generals. And now you even want to steal my subordinates?"

I couldn't really deny what she said and only stared back, at which she withdrew somewhat before clenching her teeth and staring back.

"What? Did I say anything wrong?"

At these words, I sighed, and then—

"Ben Chu!"

"!"

At the same time as my sudden yell, I swiftly raised my hand and grabbed hold of Ben Chu's

sword.

Blood sprayed out from the blade in the next instant and splattered onto Ben Chu's luxurious fur scarf.

"You, you!" Ben Chu seemed to have withdrawn a fair bit at seeing what I did and in her eyes, I could see the exact opposite of the resolve from just now.

"Meng De! What are you doing that for!" Xu You ran up and grabbed my wounded hand and forcibly separated it from the blade. Xu You's face turned pale as she looked at my hand, "Why! Why did you do this?!"

"... I'm just sad." I sighed and continued in my normal, calm tone, "We probably won't be able to see the original Ben Chu anymore."

Out of the corner of my eye, I seemed to see Ben Chu's shoulder tremble at my words.

"Ben Chu..." I said as I looked at the somewhat shell-shocked Ben Chu, "From your perspective, are Zi Yuan and the rest just your subordinates?"

"What?"

"Because you have lands, because you have authority, because you have lineage, does that mean you can act like you're above everyone else?!"

"Kuh! Subordinates are just subordinates. To me, I've long since thrown away things like companions since the time I became the Governor of Ji state." Ben Chu swung her sword away and sheathed it as she turned away so I couldn't see her face.

"Is that really all?" I smiled warmly as I looked at Ben Chu's back, "If that's the case then why did you chase after Xu You alone? Why not loose a wave of arrows at her?"

"..." Ben Chu didn't speak but I can guess why. I have that confidence.

"I believe that Ben Chu is here because you don't want to lose your last companion."

"What comp..."

"Has you been neglecting Zi Yuan more and more recently?"

Ben Chu was stunned and looked back at me with bewilderment.

Seeing Ben Chu like this, I can more or less confirm what I was guessing.

Xu You has always been ignored since a long time ago due to her frail sense of existence and only I and Ben Chu can consistently perceive her.

The reason is because we both have a heart that is accepting of all. And in our eyes, the weak but hardworking Xu You has her own characteristic charm.

But Ben Chu now, or perhaps since the time of the expedition against Dong Zhuo, has long since lost that heart.

She had unknowingly become an arrogant and narrow-minded despot.

“... Meng De, what kind of nonsense are you spouting?” Ben Chu finally mustered up what fight in her she had left after a long pause, “Times have changed and now feudal lords are rising up every which way. As the descendent of an illustrious family, all eyes of the people of the Great Han are on me as they look toward me to do something for the world. As a noble, how am I supposed to be intimate with my subordinates?”

As she said so, she pointed at me.

“And what about you? You are just the foster granddaughter of a eunuch. No one has any expectations of you. And so you can do whatever you want and advance with no pressure whatsoever. Even if you fail, you will be just one of the many failures in history. But I, as a noble of the Great Han, will forever be remembered as a sinner of the Han dynasty should I fail.”

You don't understand.

I'm tired too.

These words floated up on Ben Chu's face.

Indeed, what she said is correct. Perhaps the main difference between the 2 of us is as she said.

But...

“But what right do you have to let your stress out on your subordinates?” I was pretty riled up by now and took a quick step forward and grabbed her shoulders, “You're a noble, but so what? Shouldn't you be prioritising being a good lord over your duty to history? How can you expect your subordinates to die for you when your goals are so abstract and unreachable!!”

“Let go of me, Meng De!”

“Do you how painful it is for Zi Yuan to be by your side but not be seen by you? Is this how you treat your companions?!”

“Kuh...” My last words finally deflated Ben Chu completely. And I only loosened my grip on her when I saw regret on her face.

“Meng De... Ben Chu...” Xu You wavered between the 2 of us. She wanted to do something but she didn't know what she should do.

“Zi Yuan, go back with Ben Chu.”

“Eh?”

“I’ve helped you solve what you wanted me to, no?”

“Ah... Un.” Xu You finally recovered and looked at the letter in her hands before she finally understood and nodded shyly.

“What is the meaning of this?” Ben Chu said as she snatched the letter and began reading it.

Actually, I wasn’t looking to get information from Xu You. All I wrote on the letter was: [Do you wish for Ben Chu to return to how she was before?]. Honestly, I was just being a busybody.

What was unexpected was how fast Ben Chu got here. I’d thought it would be a very cumbersome task but it resolved itself so easily.

Was it Ben Chu herself who still paid attention to Xu You? Or was it ‘that person’ who managed to turn Ben Chu around lately?

Probably both.

As I thought so, Ben Chu had finished reading the letter and was deep in thought. She looked at me and turned away.

“Meng De is really too irritating. Just wait, I’ll defeat you soon enough.”

— Meng De! I’ll defeat you one day!

For an instant, the figure of a little girl yelling at me with an unwavering strength appeared in my eyes.

“Kekeke...” Xu You was probably thinking the same thing as I was as she started giggling.

“Hahaha.” I couldn’t hold back and began laughing as well,” Good! I await your performance on the battlefield!”

Chapter 12: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (6)

Meng De POV

Today's weather was honestly not matching up to one's expectations of winter. It was now noon, yet the sun was high above the sky, making it unbearable hot and inducing one to say things one wouldn't usually say.

Ben Chu and Zi Yuan only left 15 minutes ago. I was still standing on the mountain, reluctant to leave.

— Wu Chao, that's where I stored all my supplies which I'm going to use to defeat you, Meng De. If you wish to defeat me, assault it if you dare.

Right at the very end, Ben Chu left those words.

Ben Chu my dear girl, what is the meaning of this?

But since it's Ben Chu, then it could mean that she just wants to have a proper competition with me, and since she has numerical superiority, she decided to make it more even by giving me that piece of information.

In that case...

A breeze blew, but it was not as gentle as before.

"... Xun Yu, Cheng Yu, weren't you both supposed to be convincing the other neighbouring feudal lords? Why are you both skulking about here?" I yelled out, and after a moment, 2 black shadows dropped down from a slightly distant tree.

As the shadows landed, they knelt down.

Looks like it's those 2 as expected.

"... Lord Cao Cao." "... Imperial Chancellor."

I made my way towards them as I began thinking, "So what is it that you both are here for?"

"Lord Guo Jia ordered us to follow you." "We too felt that we should do so to ensure your safety."

Really, I can't believe I let them worry about me.

"I can't be sure of much about her, but if it's cunning, backhanded schemes, then I can assure you that Ben Chu would never do such a thing."

And if it's swordsmanship, then I'm sure I'm better than her. And I doubt they know what my original intention was anyway.

Never mind, forget it.

“Cheng Yu, Xun Yu.”

“Yes!” “Yes!”

I got on my horse as I addressed them.

“We’re going back,” I said as I pulled on the reins and the horse began to gallop off, “We need to prepare for tomorrow’s operation!”

— Tomorrow then. Tomorrow, we will finish this once and for all.

I gave this reply to Ben Chu after she left that piece of information.

Liu Bei POV

Outside the tent, life went on as usual and was mostly peaceful and calm as the soldiers went about their tasks, as though this morning’s event never happened.

But inside the tent, the retainers and generals who knew what happened were frantic.

“Eh! That Xu You actually betrayed us! Wh, what do we do now?” Feng Ji was hopping mad and flapped her black sleeves about as she exclaimed.

“Xu You is one of our earliest members so she can be said to be the one who knows all the secrets there are to know in our army.” Shen Pei was hiding behind Feng Ji as usual and was visibly worried as she continued, “If she joins Cao Cao, then all our hidden cards will be revealed. Whether its our formations, camp positions or the geography of Ji state, everything will be over~”

“That’s still fine. We can deal with those. But if Cao Cao knows about Wu Chao, and we lose it, then both attacking or retreating will be untenable.” Feng Ji shook her head as she thought about it.

And just then, Feng Ji’s opposite, a person with a stern look came in.

“Xu You, Wu Chao, these don’t matter now!”

“Eh? Tian Feng?”

Tian Feng was presently looking about with a frown and sweating profusely. This was the first time I’ve ever seen her so anxious before.

And for some reason, I involuntarily shuddered when her eyes fell on me.

“Lord Liu Bei! Why didn’t you stop my lord when she left to chase her?”

"I..." I wanted to explain myself but Tian Feng rushed over and pulled me up by my collar and began shaking me.

"Yuan Hao, this isn't Lord Liu Bei's fault." Ju Shou came over to stop Tian Feng but she didn't relent in the least.

"If any happens to my lord, I'll court martial you!"

"Are you mad, Tian Feng!! It's not like you to abuse your position!" Feng Ji, who had always held opposing views with Tian Feng, had rushed over to try and reason with and stop Tian Feng as well.

"Yan Liang and the rest have gone out to search for her already! Our lord will be fine, she'll definitely return!"

"Our lord left without a single guard, if she should run into an ambush by Cao Cao, then... Then... Then what will we fight for!" Tian Feng's voice grew weaker as she said so, and her grip loosened as well. Everyone's mood also darkened.

I had some difficulty breathing, and could call out to Zi Long who was waiting outside to save me, but at this moment, I was feeling relieved at seeing them so worried about Ben Chu.

Ben Chu, your subordinates do love you just as you do them.

"Everyone..." Just then, a soft voice that came from outside drew everyone's attention.

The curtains parted and a beautiful and gorgeous figure entered.

"My lord!"

"My lord, are you alright!?"

When they saw her, everyone rushed over immediately to Ben Chu's side and began inspecting her.

And just then, Ben Chu began hugging everyone.

"I'm sorry!" Ben Chu's voice was obviously tearful and it seems like she had been holding back for a very long while now.

"M, my lord! This is..."

As she cried, Ben Chu rubbed her face with that of the others. From my perspective, they were all very clearly intimate.

"Thank you all for everything up till now!"

Chapter 13: Intermission (1)

I keep deleting my menu by accident... And there's no way to restore it if I don't undo it immediately so there won't be easy access for some time...

Let's leave the Cao-Yuan war in Guandu and Liyang aside for now, as well as Guan Yu's journey and proceed somewhere a little more south, where some famous people have begun to move and have unknowingly been swept up into the whirlpool of history.

Sa *Sa* Sa* *Sa*

A man wearing the Great Han official uniform was carefully walking towards the inner halls as rain fell outside.

His expression was both tense and kind; his pace was both hasty yet measured. The matter which he had to report was not as simple or light as his expression would seem.

After rounding a bend, he came before a pitch black gate that had pillars at either side that were also painted black. Besides the gate and the pillars, everything else was white.

The combination of these colours were fitting with the overcast weather.

And before the pitch black gate, there were 2 women standing there,

Their clothing was very similar, and they even had the same pose where they had tucked their hands in their sleeves. The one on the left had a bright smile on, while the one on the right looked stern. If you were to take a closer look, you would find that they looked the same.

"Where is our lord?" The man asked.

The 2 guards looked at each other before the one with a stern look replied, "Our lord is inside paying respects to his ancestors as usual. Please wait here for a moment."

"Ah, un." The man nodded and took a few steps back as he prepared to wait for a while.

"Has Han Song returned?"

Just then, the gates opened, and a middle-aged man with a beard, wearing green clothing, walked out.

This man's clothing was tidy, his face was clean, and his features well-defined. He was tall as well, and stood above the 2 girls by at least a head.

Yet, one could not feel a sense of majesty from this person.

"My lord." The 2 people at the side and the man standing some ways away saluted while the tall man waved.

And the tall man spoke to the man next, "Han Song, you're back."

The man did not dare tarry, and hurriedly bowed, "Your retainer is back indeed."

"How was this trip?"

"Your retainer went to Xuchang this time, but I was unable to see Cao Cao. Seems like she has personally gone to the frontlines at Guandu."

"How does it look at Guandu?"

At this question by the tall man, the guard with the smile answered, "Yuan Shao has many generals and troops compared to Cao Cao. But compared to Cao Cao, Yuan Shao does not have the trust of her retainers so it's mostly even, therefore your retainer believes that the standoff will continue for a while more. This is especially so since Cao Cao has yet to have a breakthrough."

"... Un."

"Yuan Shao's side has sent us a letter a while ago." The serious one began to speak as well, and took out a letter and passed it to the tall man, "The contents must be a proposal for an alliance and to have us attack Cao Cao's unguarded rear."

The tall man did not open the envelope, and only stared at it after he received the letter.

After a while, he inquired the one with the smile, "Kuai Liang, what do you think we should do?"

"My lord, your retainer thinks that we can use the chance when both are embroiled in war and occupy the capital, control the Son of Heaven and wipe out both Cao and Yuan."

"... And Kuai Yue?"

"If my lord thinks that we lack the power to go it alone, we can form an alliance with either side. No matter who we choose, our side will be able to control the flow of the war and what happens from now on." The serious one said, and got more riled up as she continued, "We can decide what to do next after achieving victory for the side we so choose."

Un... The tall man sighed inside.

If I don't assist Cao Cao, and if I don't ally myself with Yuan Shao, both sides will probably blame me.

... Hmph!

... How could they blame me?!

“I’ve decided!” The tall man swung his sleeves and stood still as he continued, “We will wait here, and will not send troops to interrupt their private argument.”

“Private argument? Does my lord think that the 2 sides have involved their personal feelings?” Kuai Liang asked as she covered her mouth with her sleeve.

“Kuai Liang, I spent a fair bit of time in Luoyang, so I know what those 2 are like.” The tall man said as he shook his head, and continued walking without saying anything.

Kuai Liang and Kuai Yue did not say any further, and followed up as they held an umbrella.

As the tall man continued walking, the pitter patter of raindrops on the paper umbrella made him think back to the problem of the Battle of Guandu.

Was it really alright for him not to participate?

Why did he have to participate?

I’m a legitimate descendent of the Great Han— The Governor of Jing state, Liu Biao Liu Jing Sheng. Why do I have to do things that are outside my jurisdiction as Governor?

That small skirmish at Guandu is probably just a laughable playground fight to my Great Han ancestors.

(TL: He’s not wrong... The beginnings of the Han dynasty were actually quite epic. Liu Bang vs Xiang Yu is a lot more interesting in my opinion since Liu Bang was actually benevolent unlike Liu Bei and Xiang Yu was like a true living god of war that would have easily thrashed Lu Bu.)

(TL: It is indeed puzzling why Liu Biao chose not to act at all – He was the only one, apart from Sun Ce, who had the power to stand up to Cao Cao or Yuan Shao at this point.)

Chapter 14: Intermission (2)

The sea breeze blew across the shore, cooling the air. The waters of the Yangtze River were choppy and kept rushing towards the rocks, making clear sounds when they clashed. It was good scenery but the waves were a tad too violent.

Just 100 paces away from this scenic spot, an emergency tent stood at odds with its surroundings.

“Ah!” A heart-wrenching cry sounded out, as though the one who cried out had her flesh torn apart.

And the source of the cry lay in the tent.

A girl wearing loose clothing with bandages around her breasts lay on a white bed. Even though she was writhing in pain, her eyes never weakened for a single moment and were as vicious as always. On closer look, one would find that her left shoulder was swollen and purplish red as it bled profusely.

“Big sister...” A young girl of about 14-5 stood outside the tent and gripped the tent tightly with both hands as she watched the scene before her. Fear and worry filled her eyes as she looked on at her elder sister.

“Be good, little sister... Big sis is okay...” It was obvious that her wound was not fine at all as it took all she had to squeeze out these words with her trembling lips.

When met with this scene, the surrounding people began to get agitated.

“Eh! If only I was with my lord when we went hunting!”

“It’s not your fault, Han Dang. I, Cheng Pu am responsible. Back when Xu Gong was to be killed, I should have stood up and stopped it...”

(TL: Xu Gong is one of the feudal lords that Sun Ce defeated on his way to unifying Jiangdong. Xu Gong surrendered but remained disloyal and sent letters to Cao Cao when Sun Ce was planning to attack Xuchang while Cao Cao was at Guandu. Sun Ce executed Xu Gong but his son and 2 servants escaped and assassinated Sun Ce later on.)

The 2 big men stood beside the bandaged girl with regretful expressions. Their figures seemed small and withdrawn, and their beards were pointing downwards. Neither of them seemed as fearsome and magnificent as before.

“There’s no use saying all that now. In any case, our lord is being treated right now.” Out of nowhere, a little girl’s innocent voice could be heard. It was tender, but seeped with authority, “You, the one who claimed to be Hua Tuo’s disciple, can you really save our lord?”

The little girl’s question was directed at the man in a yellow robe who was presently sitting beside the bandaged girl and taking her pulse. After a long while as he examined her, he

finally spoke up, "Lord Zhang, in summary, the poison from the arrow has yet to reach her heart. As long as she regularly applies the medicine I have prepared and rests for 100 days, she will recover."

At this, everyone in the tent could finally heave a small sigh of relief.

A lazy, useless looking man stood on the other side while a young girl with a majestic aura and wore colourful drapes while she held a feather fan stood in front of him.

"But if that's the case..." The man muttered softly, but did not continue as he felt it would be inappropriate.

But the girl in front of him who held the feather fan already knew what he wanted to say.

"Un, the plan to attack Xuchang from the rear will have to be shelved." The girl had a look of dissatisfaction on her face but she closed her eyes and calmed down her emotions before she continued, "But that can't be helped. Your health is more important."

"..." The bandaged girl opened and closed her mouth, as though she was trying to say something.

"Un? My lord?" The feather fan girl went up close and grasped the bandaged girl's hand.

The bandaged girl raised her head slightly. "..."

Her voice was extremely soft, but the feather fan girl heard everything loud and clear.

— Let my little sister take my place. You will advise her on external affairs, and internal Zi Bu.

"My lord, you're not dying so why did you leave words that sound like a will?" The feather fan girl nodded and smiled bitterly before turning to look at her new young master, "... Un, I got it. It's about time we trained the little lord up."

Sun Quan was presently just 14 years of age but because Sun Ce had to rest for 100 days after sustaining the wound from the attempted assassination, Sun Quan had to take over administration of Jiangdong.

Everyone soon left, and only Sun Ce was left in the tent so she could rest peacefully.

(TL: That's rest peacefully, not rest in peace mind you!)

If I don't take care of my body, how can I have the energy to speak with Xuan De when he comes to Jiangdong? Sun Ce got a little excited as this thought came to mind.

(TL: If you read the original, you know that Liu Bei marries a daughter of the Sun family eventually. Doesn't seem like there are any others besides Sun Ce and Sun Quan so I really wonder who he will take, if he does.)

Chapter 15: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (7)

Liu Bei POV

From noon till evening, and from evening till night. Ben Chu and her retainers have been in the tent all this while, and as I looked at the tent now, it was still completely lit up.

"... Is my lord not sleeping yet?"

"Un, I'll be waiting for a while more."

Gong You came over to persuade me to sleep but for some reason, Ben Chu gave me the impression that she was much more approachable and friendly this morning but at the same time, I felt worried when I saw her.

Ben Chu never explained what she did when she left, and no one could figure it out either.

It may not be my business but I don't feel like sleeping yet when they are all still up. And I also have the feeling that Ben Chu will call me in soon.

A storm might be coming soon.

"Xuan De~~"

Ben Chu's attitude, the outcome of the Battle of Guandu, and after that is...

"Xuan De~~~"

"Ah!" A small force pulled on me, and I nearly fell over. I turned and saw that Xu You was standing there with a helpless smile on.

"Ah, I, I'm really sorry!" I hurriedly apologised when I realised what happened, "I was thinking of something just now and didn't see you!"

Xu You shook her head as she forgave me, "It's okay, it's okay. I'm the one who should apologise for involving you in my mess today." Xu You bowed before continuing, "Back to why I'm here, Ben Chu called for you."

"Ben Chu called for me?"

Looks like my guess was right on mark. I nodded and Xu You went ahead into the tent without saying any further.

I thought there would be a tense atmosphere in the tent but from afar, I began to hear things that seemed inexplicable.

"Ah!! Why have I lost again!"

"Hahaha! Drink, Tian Feng!"

“You all must have cheated!”

From afar, the smell of liquor and drunken slurs could be heard.

What is this... I was very bewildered and began taking big steps toward the tent.

“Ben Chu? — Wu!” I was going to ask her what she wanted from me but the smell of liquor in the tent was so thick that my eyes squinted and I was forced to swallow back my words. After I got used to it, the sight of the strategists who had been scheming and fighting with each other all along were sitting around with their clothing in a dishevelled state while wine bottles were strewn all over the tent.

“Eh?! Lord Liu Bei is here?”

“What! The Imperial Uncle of the Great Han is here to drink too?! Or have you come here to do something else!”

“Hahahaha!”

Wu... I couldn't help but to take a step back at this.

“Th, this is...”

I looked at Xu You for help, but she kept her helpless smile on as she explained, “The mood was still very heavy in the morning, but Ben Chu suddenly said that she wanted to play drinking guessing games and it ended up like this...”

“My lord! Why do you always refuse to listen to what I say!” Just then, Tian Feng yelled out. She had drunk so much that her face was completely red and her clothes were slipping off but she didn't pay any attention to that as she complained to Ben Chu, “I may be a little bit tactless but I've always said only the things that needed to be said! Why won't my lord listen to a loyal retainer like me!”

“Tian Feng! Why won't you understand the difficulties that our lord faces?!” Feng Ji suddenly stood up and her black robes shook and would have fallen to the ground if it weren't for Shen Pei at the back who hugged her, “Our lord comes from the most illustrious of noble families and is not someone who any ordinary person can just point at and admonish, Our lord must have a reason for every decision she makes! Whether the decision is right or wrong, that is also up to our lord! Why won't you understand that!”

“That's right! That's right!” Shen Pei chimed in as well.

Though they were arguing with each other, the seriousness of what they said and their appearances now were completely at odds and they didn't seem serious in the least.

As for Ben Chu who was sitting at the head, her red face had a look of elation.

Ah.

Ben Chu seems to have seen me, and she noisily got up and made her way over using the tent as support.

Ben Chu's clothing was only held together by a single silver button to begin with, and that button was now undone. Moreover, her body was swaying about as she walked over and I really didn't know where I should look.

Xu You hurriedly went over and tidied up Ben Chu's clothing when she realised this.

"Xuan~~ De, let's go out." Ben Chu pointed outside the tent when she came up to me and then pulled me out of the door.

"So happy!" Ben Chu yelled out with satisfaction as she lay on the grass. I and Xu You had supported Ben Chu along the way and we were now at an empty field somewhere in the encampment.

"Xuan De!! I met with Meng De today!"

Eh? Before I could gather my thoughts, an unexpected news shocked me.

She met with Meng De!

I looked at Xu You, who smiled in response. Looks like this has to do with her.

"Xuan De, you were right." Ben Chu continued on without a care, "What is prestige! What is lineage! It's all fake!"

As she said so, Ben Chu raised her hands and looked up at the starry sky, "I am Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu! I am the Governor of Ji state and leader of my companions! I am not anything else!"

"Ben Chu..."

Ben Chu was clearly very excited, and she didn't continue shouting but she was still happily humming.

Seems like she found her true self.

The Ben Chu who wants to treat her subordinates as companions, the Ben Chu who just wants to be a part of everyone else. That is the Ben Chu she wants to be.

When I looked at this Ben Chu, I finally felt relieved.

I don't know what Meng De said to her, but it seems to have worked. Though our positions may be on opposing sides now, I feel that I should be grateful to Meng De.

I think I am fortunate to have been able to see Ben Chu's other side.

“Meng De!!” Just then, Ben Chu began to yell out again. She seemed to have gathered all the stress in her as she finished off with one last line–

“We meet tomorrow on the battlefield!!”

Chapter 16: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (8)

Meng De POV

Get in line! Get into your formations!

Grab your weapons now! You will still have to go onto the frontlines even if you have to go barehanded!

Why haven't the northern divisions gathered here yet? The cavalry battalions are all there, how are we supposed to complete our formation!

The thundering roll of wheels and the messy clang of plates and boots resounded throughout the encampment.

The table was small to begin with, and now that it was shaking, I didn't bother placing anything on it.

Well, not that there is anything to put on it. I continued putting on my armour and clothing as I thought so.

"... My Lo... Rd." All of a sudden, a ghastly voice that sounded like that of a spirit was sent into my ears along with the sounds of heavy breathing.

"Feng Xiao, what have you come here to do?" Just from the voice alone, I could tell who was behind me.

"... My lord is a spoil sport. You should have at least pretended to be scared."

I smiled as I turned to look at Feng Xiao and saw she had a tired look on and her eyes were drooping as she wiped her mouth with her sleeve.

She must have been overworking herself these few days.

Even though her health is...

"Is everything settled? I heard quite the commotion going on outside."

"Un, I've left all military affairs to Jia Xu. She's a little strange but she's talented with both management and tactics."

"Jia Xu huh... Alright, she's still just a junior military minister. We'll give her a promotion when we return."

But Feng Xiao, you shouldn't be the one calling others strange. I thought so in my mind but didn't say it.

When I looked at Feng Xiao again, I saw that she looked like she had more to say and waited for her to speak.

Feng Xiao saw that I knew she had more to say and came up close before she continued in a low voice, "My lord said that you saw Yuan Shao and learned of the supply cache at Wu Chao which is why you wanted to end this decisively so urgently."

"Un, that is the case." I hooked on my armour as I replied.

"My lord, are you an idiot?" Feng Xuao began scolding me, but I saw this coming, "The others may not dare to say this but I do. Are you actually going to believe what Yuan Shao said?"

"All Yuan Shao wants is a proper and upright battle. She will not risk the integrity, honour and reputation of her family that has been passed down for 4 generations just so that she can trick me once."

"What use is reputation in such troubled times?"

"It's Yuan Shao, she wants to attain victory but also maintain her family's honour." I began to speak a little more anxiously but that wasn't because of Feng Xiao's questioning, but because I was having trouble reaching the back hook.

After seeing my troubled expression, Feng Xiao finally came over and helped me.

"And what if there is an ambush waiting for us there? Even if what Yuan Shao says is true, how do we overcome our numerical disadvantage?"

I smiled at this.

"Isn't thinking of how to solve these problems your job?"

Liu Bei POV

Dong— *Dong*—

After over a hundred drum beats, the troops were in line and ready for battle.

Though they got in formation everyday, up till now, they had only cursed and swore at the other side in Guandu for a bit before retreating. And today, Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu was personally leading the troops.

By Ben Chu's orders, they were only to wait and were not to throw insults.

And in this silence, one could see that there was a lot of movement in the faraway tents at Guandu.

"Ah, my head hurts..." By now, Ben Chu had taken off her luxurious clothing and wore a rarely seen set of golden plate armour. I was on a horse beside her procession and saw a hung over Ben Chu holding her head with one hand and supporting her chin with the other.

Why did you have to drink so much yesterday if you're going to war today?

"Xuan De, when the battle begins, remember to stay behind me. If anything happens to you, I don't know how I'm going to answer to your little sisters."

"Un, I got it. Don't worry, Zi Long."

And behind me was Zi Long who would join me on the battlefield.

Zi Long was very much against me joining this battle. Gong You as well hoped that I could feign illness just before the battle and leave to Runan where I could prepare to reunite with Yun Chang.

From what I can remember, Liu Bei did not participate in the latter half of the Battle of Guandu. But though I'm Liu Bei, I am also not Liu Bei.

I feel like I have to remain here to bear witness to something.

"Hai, though Xuan De's martial arts is lacking and doesn't know how to command troops," Zi Long who was now beside me began to complain, "But it's times like this that Xuan De is really like that idiot."

"That's definitely not praise, right?" All she said were my faults, though admittedly I have no merits to speak of.

And the idiot that Zi Long was referring to was probably Gongsun Bo Gui.

Even though it's been a long time now, I and Zi Long just can't seem to forget that girl with the silly laugh.

"Xuan De, General Zhao Yun is right. You need not and should not be a part of this battle."

Eh?

Just then, Zhang He who was on my left spoke to me in a soft voice.

I looked over as I felt that she had more to say but she had her helmet on and I couldn't see what expression she had on her beautiful face and she didn't seem like she intended to continue either.

Dong *Dong* *Dong*— *Dong* *Dong* *Dong*—

I was going to ask her but a round of drum beats interrupted my thoughts.

The Cao army had left their camp—

Someone in our formation yelled out and in the next instant, the Cao army began pouring out of their encampment and formed their lines and got into formation.

“Finally!!” When Ben Chu saw this, she completely forgot her hangover. She seemed excited as she looked at the grand formation on the other side with wide open eyes.

“Xuan De—” Ben Chu, who was on cloud nine, called out to me all of a sudden.

“Ah, un?”

I turned to her and all of a sudden my field of vision was filled with 2 giant mounds and a certain softness enveloped my head.

“Ben, Ben Chu?”

“It’s largely thanks to you that I was able to face myself. And so I want to thank you, for coming along with me to this battlefield.” Ben Chu only moved away after a few seconds and smiled as she said to me, “I wanted to give you other rewards but this will have to do for now. I’ll make up for it when we go back.”

Her radiant, beautiful smile seemed ever more charming after what she did, and I couldn’t help but to turn away.

And what greeted me on the other side was Zi Long’s sullen face.

“I will remember to report this to your little sisters in vivid detail when we reunite.”

Eh?

Cao Cao takes the field—

I wanted to ask her what she meant, but the words Cao Cao sharply drew my attention.

In the distance, a stern, confident girl rode out slowly on a stallion.

Meng De... I see you’re doing well. I thought in my heart. For some reason, even though she’s on the opposite side of this conflict as I am, even though I’ve suffered attacks from her, I can’t seem to feel any hatred for her.

“Meng De, I’ve been waiting for you.” Ben Chu said as she drew her sabre by her side.

The atmosphere turned became severe and grim in an instant.

My heart began thumping as history began its course.

Chapter 17: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (9)

TL: How the Battle of Guandu will proceed from here will be very different from history...

Liu Bei POV

Dong *Dong* *Dong* *Dong* ...

Messy drums resounded in the skies as 2 sides sought to seek an end to this battle one and for all on these plains.

At this moment, everyone was on high alert. Though the beat of drums on both sides were nauseating, I wasn't perturbed in the least.

Everyone was waiting. Waiting for that one word, and that one act.

"Un." Ben Chu seems to have made her resolve as she nodded and drew her sabre as she received a long spear a soldier prepared for her.

"Warriors!!!" She called to all her troops and raised her sword as she roared out, "Whether we win or lose, it will all end today! Now let me hear you all!"

Victory to Yuan Shao! Victory to Yuan Shao! Victory to Yuan Shao!

Following Ben Chu's cue, several tens of thousands of people yelled out at the top of their lungs in unison which shook the earth and covered the drums.

"Charge!!—"

Ah—

Her troops charged behind the 2 generals leading on the left and right as Ben Chu swung her sword forward and roared.

All I saw were unbroken lines and lines of soldiers. I couldn't see any particular's person's face, and it was as if everyone had become one, and advanced toward one objective for one goal.

"Xuan De, watch as history is being written." In the midst of the chaos, Ben Chu seemed to have yelled out to me.

By my estimates, of the troops that had charged at Meng De's camp, they were roughly slightly more than Meng De's troops but strangely, Meng De's formation did not change in response to the charge.

"Ha! You intend on defending huh?," Ben Chu said to herself as she swung her sword again.

Feng Ji immediately changed the drum beat to one that would signal the troops to change

their formation when she saw this.

And in the next instant, the troops that charged out positioned themselves in a crane wing formation from a single file to outflank Meng De's troops. And at either end of the formation, several cavalry battalions were ready to charge in and break Meng De's defensive lines and attack the rear.

"They have so many mobile tactical units... Even if Meng De wants to change formation now, she can't; and if their army gets separated, they will be destroyed very quickly." Zi Long said, perhaps to herself, or perhaps to explain what was going on to me as she squinted.

And reflected in my eyes were Ben Chu's troops who were now just several hundred meters from the Cao army's first defensive line.

What was Meng De planning?

Even though I was on Ben Chu's side, I was now worrying for Meng De.

Dong! *Dong*!

Un?

"Consecutive firecrackers!? Is Meng De going to do something!?" Ben Chu was shocked by this sound and she hurriedly checked her surroundings.

Dong! *Dong*!

"Where is the sound coming from?!"

"They're coming from both east and west, my lord!" Feng Ji was very anxious as well.

Meng De, you definitely have something going on as expected right?

I began to feel an inexplicable fear and anxiety from being infected by the atmosphere.

Die—

And just then, everyone was shocked as cries for blood could be heard from both sides. Troops could now be seen charging at Ben Chu's troops from east and west, both of which held the Cao army flags.

One flag had [夏侯] emblazoned on it while the other had [绣].

"My lord, looks like Zhang Xiu has joined Cao Cao!"

"Damn it, not just that, Yingchuan's garrison has made it here!" Ben Chu pulled forcefully on the reins of her horse and made it raise its front legs as it got ready readied to charge.

"My lord! Calm down!" Tian Feng who was standing on the ground fearlessly reached out

and calmed the horse down, “The Xiahou army is the stronger of the 2, Gao Lan should lead a cavalry unit and stop them! Archers in the back, wait for our lord’s signal to assist the vanguard!”

Tian Feng slapped Ben Chu’s plate skirt when she finished. And with this assistance from Tian Feng, Ben Che finally calmed down.

“Archers at the ready—” The sound of hundreds of bowstrings being pulled back filled the air as she raised her sword above her head and pointed it at the sky.

It was silent for a single moment until...

“Fire!—” And in the next instant, the sound of loosened bowstrings filled my ears.

“Watch out, my lord!”

“Watch out, Xuan De!!” Along with Zi Long’s cry, wave upon wave of arrows landed. And the arrows landed right before me.

Eh?

Why were the arrows aimed at our own side?

Chapter 18: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (10)

Liu Bei POV

Sou *Sou* *Sou* *Sou*...

Spread out!!

The soldiers adhered the order to disperse as best as they could but the dense rain of arrows still fell many.

"Xuan De, what are you doing!" Zi Long dragged me down my horse by the collar as she exclaimed.

"Don't move, stay!" Zi Long's voice resounded in me.

I was utterly shocked by the black rain that was falling down and could only sit motionlessly on the ground.

All that was reflected in my eyes was Zi Long's figure as she spun her silver spear and danced about, deflecting and cutting down all incoming arrows which were so fast I couldn't even see their movements clearly. All incoming arrows were cut down with no exception and landed benignly in pieces.

"Xuan De! Are you alright?!" Ben Chu asked from the other side.

"Un, still good!" I twisted my neck as I yelled back, and saw that Ben Chu was swinging her sword left and right, and saw that even her horse was unscathed as well.

"Tian Yuan Hao! Are the others alright?!"

"I'm good! Feng Ji got hit by an arrow!"

"M, my lord! It was just a scratch!"

On the other side of Ben Chu, I saw Tian Feng and Shen Pei holding on to Feng Ji as they hid behind the shield columns in the chaos, all of them looking flustered.

"Kuh!" A rare click of the tongue came from Ben Chu as she looked about, "Where did the arrows come from?!"

"My lord, looks like something happened at Guo Tu's side!"

"Guo Tu!!" Ben Chu roared and pulled the reins as she charged toward the rearguard.

Tian Feng wanted to stop her but she didn't say anything as she slowly retreated while carrying Feng Ji who had an arrow in her leg, and commanded the troops as she did so.

Even if Ben Chu changed... Looks like there are some she can never win over huh.

I wonder what feelings Ben Chu has as she sets out to quell a mutiny.

At this time, the wave of arrows has ended. And Zi Long, who had been blocking the arrows all this while for me hurriedly slapped the me who was in a daze.

“Xuan De, let’s take this chance and retreat back to Liyang. The troops we raised in Ye city should not die here.” Zi Long said as she mounted her horse and reached out her hand, “And I can’t let Xuan De get hurt.”

...

I looked at myself, and saw that I was basically lying on the ground helplessly, and looked at surroundings and saw that many amongst the few hundred men I brought were injured.

That’s right, what can I possibly do when I’m like this? I’ll only be a hindrance.

I’m of no help to this battle whatsoever. Perhaps it might actually be better if I didn’t go.

As I thought so, I reached out to take Zi Long’s hand.

Rumble...

Just then, tremors came from an area which should have been devoid of any troops.

An ominous feeling filled my heart as I looked over instinctively...

At the far right of the front lines, a large Cao cavalry unit was preparing to charge in a different direction from where the battlefield was, and at its head was—

Meng De?!

“... Zi Long.” I withdrew the hand I had extended to Zi Long.

“Un? Xuan De, what are you doing?! Hurry up! We’re getting out of here!”

“... Zi Long, we’re going after Ben Chu.”

“Eh? Xuan De, what are you—” i Long was baffled and stared at me for a long while before swallowing back the rest of the sentence, “Eh! You’re really troublesome, you know! Unit leader, retreat with all our men first!”

As she said so, she pulled me up her horse and made me sit behind her.

“Grab on tight! Don’t fall!” Zi Long yelled as she pulled on the reins and the horse galloped off in the direction where Ben Chu went.

I thanked her softly and tightly wrapped my arms around Zi Long’s waist.

Meng De POV

My capable generals should be pinning down Zhang He and Gao Lan at the back.

I ordered Xiahou Dun to launch a surprise attack with the troops from Yingchuan on one side, and Zhang Xiu and her troops from Qing state who I managed to convince in time on the other side, thereby completing a surround on the Yuan army.

And on the other side, Ben Chu should be preoccupied with Guo Tu.

Guo Tu is a greedy woman who likes inciting conflict and an incessant flatterer. She is the sort of disloyal subordinate that is easy to convince. Using her heavily is one of Ben Chu's rare personnel mistakes.

And right ahead was the supply cache Ben Chu told me of— Wu Chao.

Hai~ Ben Chu, you're still not my match when it comes to tactics. Though you tried very hard, you still can't overcome the causes of your defeat today which have festered for a long while now.

And in this conflict, I will not hold back, just as you have wished for.

"Big sis, is it really alright to raid Wu Chao with just this small cavalry unit?!"

The only one who came along with me was my younger cousin Cao Hong. I wanted to bring Cao Ren along as well but she had not yet returned from her suppression of Liu Pi.

"It'll be fine," I laughed as I swept my hair back and nodded, "Intel has reported that the one guarding Wu Chao is an old officer Dun Yu Qiong who was formerly stationed in Luoyang. That man is strong but when I worked with him in Luoyang, I found him to be arrogant and though he was good at leading shock troop units, he is poor at defending a fort."

"But Yuan Shao should know that we will raid Wu Chao right?"

"Wen Chou and Yan Liang have both died in combat. Ju Yi was wrongly executed. Zhang He and Gao Lan are currently occupied." I said as I swung the reins, "Who else in Yuan Shao's camp can stand before us Cao sisters?!"

I may have said a little too much but that was the truth.

"The battalion on the right! Wield your torches and break the gates of Wu Chai!"

"Yes!!" The subordinate general of the right battalion yelled in acknowledgement and hastened his horse towards the encampment that was by now not too far away.

As long as I can burn down Wu Chao, Ben Chu will be finished.

And after this, I will probably never have a chance to chat with Ben Chu and Zi Yuan together again.

It's a little sad but I have to put aside my personal feelings for the sake of the world.

Ah!—

!

A horrifying roar of rage came from the front and forced me to throw aside all other stray thoughts.

Not too far away, the cavalry in the vanguard were stopped and scattered about. And most importantly, the gates of Wu Chao were not yet open.

“B, big sis!! Look at that person!”

I looked ahead when I heard my little sister's trembling voice and saw a tall woman wearing a set of red plate armour. As she swung her glaive, she yelled out and drove back my troops, making them unable to even touch Wu Chao's gates.

Was this person— Yan Liang?!

I was completely stunned.

As expected, one shouldn't say too much of oneself.

(TL: In the original, Guo Tu was the one who had Tian Feng's role here – Ordering the troops – and he was the one who ordered Zhang He and Gao Lan to continue attacking instead of saving Wu Chao.)

Chapter 19: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (11)

Meng De POV

Let me pose a question, how much power can a glaive possible have?

It could easily knock over a soldier, or several, and even slay a general in a single slash.

But I learned, right now, that a glaive could be used to stop an entire army numbering into the thousands.

"Ha!" An earth-splitting roar came from not far off as Yan Liang swung her glaive with full force. Several cries could be heard and an entire row of cavalry fell off their horses, their heads separated from their bodies.

Yan Liang. No matter how I look at her, she's the great general of Hebei, Yan Liang.

But... Wasn't she supposed to have died in combat?! Why is she here...

Could it be?! That Yan Liang didn't die then? That Ben Chu, I can't believe she still had such a card hidden at this stage.

"Big sis? Big sister!"

"Ah?" Hong yelled at me and I realised that I didn't have the time to think about such things. And so I hurriedly spoke to Hong, "Hong, better be mentally prepared!"

"I don't need you to tell me that!" Hong replied as she hurriedly followed and even overtook me.

"Decurion! Lend me your long spear!" I yelled out and received the decurion's spear and spun it in my hands.

Yan Liang, if you think we're going to be easy to deal with then you're very, very wrong.

I'll show you, the martial prowess of the Cao family!

Liu Bei POV

Guo Tu did indeed mutiny, and her troops had followed suit as well. And this mutiny of hers had caused the base camp which had less than 10,000 people to be instantly engulfed by chaos.

And I and Zi Long were here in the heart of the chaos because of my decision.

"Zi Long! Have you seen Ben Chu!?"

"Eh! She should have come this way!" Zi Long yelled back as she surveyed the chaos and

searched for Ben Chu's figure while simultaneously dealt with incoming enemies.

"Ha!!"

My eyes soon spotted the gorgeous figure in the distance.

Ben Chu was swinging her long spear as she weaved through the sea of people with her warhorse. She was quite a distance away but I could see from Ben Chu's eyes that she was zeroing in on a target, and was directing bloodlust at that target.

And not far ahead of Ben Chu was a frantic person in administrative official garb who was trying her best to direct her horse to leave this area as fast as possible.

"Zi Long! Over there!" I hurriedly pointed at Ben Chu for Zi Long.

"Xuan De, don't do stupid things! Someone might cut off your arm." Zi Long admonished me as she slapped my arm with the pole of her spear and pulled on the reins as she headed for the administrative official.

(TL: Son – "Mum, look, over there!", Mother – "Keep your hands in the car!")

"If I'm not wrong, that administrative official should be Guo Tu!"

"Then what do we do? Are we going to kill her when we get there?"

"Eh?" Zi Long's words stunned me.

What sort of role am I supposed to play in such a matter?

"Guo Tu! Surrender your life!" While I was hesitating about what to do, Ben Chu was now less than 10 paces away from that person.

"Ben Chu—" I called out to her for some unknown reason but after I did so, I realised that I didn't know what I ought to say.

"Kaa!!"

But whatever it was I wanted to say, it was already too late. Ben Chu's sabre had now slashed down from the administrative official's shoulder down to her stomach. If Ben Chu were to use just a little more strength, she would probably be able to slice her in 2.

Blood sprayed everywhere instantly and a line of blood splattered on Ben Chu's face, which had a bloodthirsty expression on.

"Zi Long."

"Ah, un."

I bade Zi Long to hurry forward and we eventually made it to where Ben Chu was.

“Ben Chu! Ben Chu!” I hurriedly called out.

Ben Chu slowly came back to her senses as she gasped for air and looked at me, “Haa... Haa... Xuan De.” She said as she wiped the blood off her face, and then smiled, “Hahaha! This is so embarrassing. Not only was I betrayed, I’m even reduced to such a pathetic state.”

“No, I don’t think so at all.” I hurriedly shook my head and was about to explain what I felt but swallowed back my words when I saw Ben Chu’s sorrowful expression.

“Guo Tu Guo Gong Ze. It was her idea to take Ji state, attack Han Fu and siege Gongsun Zan. Her strategies were good, but she has no honour, but I still listened to her words anyway. Now that I think about it, has she always been loyal to me or was she traitorous all along?”

Eat this! Die!!

S, spare me!!

Run, run, I don’t want to die here!

The surrounding pandemonium was the same as it was but I could hear Ben Chu’s words loud and clear.

If it were me, could I tell who was loyal and who wasn’t amongst those who follow me? And if there were a traitor, do I have the resolve to kill him?

“Xuan De! Why are you sinking into thought at this time?! Don’t you have something to say?!”

Ah! That’s right, I still have things to do.

“Ben Chu, now isn’t the time for this!” I said as I hurriedly shook Ben Chu’s shoulders, “Meng De has launched a raid on Wu Chao, you have to get it together!”

“Ah! Meng De is at Wu Chao?!” Ben Chu blinked and then thought calmly for a moment before she breathed out, “Un, I got it.”

Thereafter, Ben Chu gathered all the troops that were in the area and rushed to Wu Chao and began to surround the Cao raid.

Zi Long asked me what I intended on doing, but my intentions were naturally the same as before.

Chapter 20: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (12)

TL: Fixed the menus at the top.

Liu Bei POV

Hei! Hei!

Whip after whip landed on the horse as Ben Chu galloped at full speed for Wu Chao. Even Zi Long's white stallion was unable to keep up.

After I called out to her over and over, she finally realised that the troops behind couldn't keep up and slowed her pace.

Ben Chu's expression was a lot calmer now, and her disposition seemed a lot more normal.

"Xuan De, I'm sorry for letting you see so many of my embarrassing failures."

"No, you can't really predict for sure how a battle would go in the first place." I said as I worriedly looked at Ben Chu.

To be honest, given what I know, it is impossible for Ben Chu to win the Battle of Guandu.

It was only just now that I remembered this— That though this history was not the one I knew, it would not be too different.

Even though Yan Liang didn't die, and was sent to guard Wu Chao, could Ben Chu really win the Battle of Guandu like this?

As I thought so, I looked at Ben Chu. She seemed exhausted even though it was just a few hours since the battle began, and her energy was spent.

This was normal though. Even someone like me who didn't do anything was fighting to stay alert.

"Zi Long, are you alright?" I couldn't help but be worried for Zi Long as I thought so.

Zi Long didn't turn back, and shrugged her shoulders as a gesture that she was alright as she said, "I'm not you so I won't tire so easily. Xuan De needs to train a lot more. You're like a little old man."

"Little..."

"Hahaha," Ben Chu suddenly laughed when she heard this, "If only I had a relationship with my subordinates like you earlier." Ben Chu sighed as she said so.

Her sudden words took me off guard and I didn't know how to reply her at that moment.

"You and Meng De are right. I am really different from when I was younger." Ben Chu seemed more relaxed as she said so, and began to speak about the past, "I don't know if you've heard this from Zi Yuan, but us 3 were quite an impressive faction in the Court then! The official positions I and Meng De had then were low. We had capability but no authority to follow though, but the help Xu You rendered us was great, and enabled us to deal with the Ten Attendants marvellously. Back then, we were all friends, and there was nothing we couldn't talk about with each other."

Ben Chu's eyes reflected the scenes from years back as she reminisced about the past.

"Back then, I and Meng De were really competitive and we hatched a lot of schemes against each other, and argued a lot too but our relations never soured. Only when we had established ourselves, and formed our own positions on certain matters did we really begin to grow distant. And now here we are at Guandu. I have many reasons for fighting, be it a desire to be the one who supports the Son of Heaven, or a dissatisfaction to be second to Meng De. But—"

Columns of smoke rose slowly to the sky not far off in front of us.

That, was Wu Chao,

"But this showdown will decide things once and for all!" Ben Chu said and swung her reins.

Meng De POV

I bent my knees and gathered strength as I leapt out and lunged for Yan Liang with my sword aimed at her through.

My sword was deflected with a clatter by the glaive and the force of the attack knocked me aside several paces.

Yan Liang, you've been had!

"Ha!!" Hong suddenly appeared behind Yan Liang and roared out with fury, making Yan Liang frantic as she hurriedly leapt from her horse and dodge Hong's attack by a hair's breadth. Hong's broadsword landed on the horse's back and reached its heart, killing it instantly.

Sou— Yan Liang who had now regained her balance slashed at Hong with her glaive who dodged just barely in time and retreated to where I was.

"Haa... Haa... Haa..." Only now did I dare to relax a little and calm my breathing.

"Haa... Big sis, looks like we finally got her off her horse." Hong was clearly exhausted. Just forcing Yan Liang off her horse required 30 minutes of attacks from both I and Hong.

Yan Liang, you're far more formidable than I thought you were. Be it martial prowess or

bravery, you are definitely one of the strongest generals in the world.

Perhaps she is just talented, or perhaps she seeks vengeance. But no matter what, I have to admit that I and Hong are not a match for Yan Liang.

“Hmph! Looks like you both are nothing much after all. Since your Grand Marshal flag is here, then one of you both must be Cao Cao!” Yan Liang smiled darkly, and readied her stance to attack, “I can’t tell who is Cao Cao, so I’ll just have to take both your heads!”

“!” As she finished, she lunged right for me before I could even react.

Ah! No!

Clatter— *Ding*!

Kuh! My sword’s been knocked away!

I hurriedly jumped back as I was disarmed.

Ah!

But who knew that I would land with one foot in a pothole, “Ah...” The world seemed to slow as I lost balance and fell, and in my eyes was that glaive swinging down at me.

“Ha!! Eat this blade from me, Cao Cap!” All of a sudden, an enraged bellow came from my left and a longsword stabbed at Yan Liang who turned her blade to block it.

I looked and saw that it was Hong who saved me.

But...

Cao... Cao...

“Cao Cao?!” Yan Liang asked the question I wanted to ask and before I could react, Yan Liang’s attention was all focused on Hong.

No!

“Cao Cao! Die!!” Flames erupted in Yan Liang’s eyes as she slashed down at Hong, who was impersonating me.

Chapter 21: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (13)

(Big sis, I don't understand. Why do you dream so big?)

(Hong, how big do you think the world is?)

(The world? How am I supposed to describe that? Well, it's as big as you want it to be, I guess.)

(What I think is the world is as big as your heart, since everything else you cannot accept can be considered outside of your world.)

(If that's the case, then big sis's heart must be really big.)

(Of course— Someone has to accept everything after all. Even if it is tiring.)

(But why is big sis willing to be such a person? Can't you leave it to someone else?)

(... I'm only doing it because I can, that's all.)

Meng De POV

Cha! The sound of something tearing rang out for an instant, and in the next moment, blood sprayed out in all directions; onto Yan Liang and into my eyes.

"Kuah!!!" Hong's scream filled the air and brought me back to my senses from my daze.

"How is it? Cao Cao! Does it feel good with 1 less arm!" Only after hearing Yan Liang's delighted voice did I accept the scene before me as reality.

Hong's right arm was completely severed from her shoulder, and all that was left was a bleeding wound. She lay on the ground and looked lifelessly at her severed arm. She was biting on her lips from the pain and a grim expression as she desperately tried to stop her bleeding with her other arm.

"Hong!"

"Big sis, what are you doing!" Hong yelled out as she endured the sheer amount of pain and raised her head to look at me with a smile, "The world can do without Hong, but it cannot do without Cao Meng De!"

(TL: This conversation also happened in original but elsewhere obviously. It was supposed to take place when Cao Cao continued to pursue Dong Zhuo alone after Luoyang was burned down.)

As she finished, a fresh spurt of blood flowed out from her wound as she picked up a sword beside her and threw it to me.

“What?! You’re Cao Cao!” Yan Liang’s eyes wavered for a moment but she soon regained her ferocious expression as she lunged at me once more.

As the blade Hong threw spun in the air, Yan Liang’s glaive came for me.

... Little sis, I’ll do something about your arm.

I, Cao Meng De, am no ordinary person after all!

Ding! I bent backwards and felt the glaive slide across my body, and hurriedly reached out to grab the incoming sword.

“Don’t think you’ll get your way!” When Yan Liang saw that her blade did not reach me, she followed through with the momentum of her initial attack and rotated as she slashed at me from the other side.

“Yan Liang! Your story ends here!” I yelled out and used whatever physical strength I had left and jumped up, dodging the glaive’s path and also the blade Hong had thrown over.

Another clang rang out as the blade crashed into Yan Liang’s glaive and deflected Yan Liang’s glaive.

“Kuh!” Yan Liang clicked her tongue and readied herself for another attack on me.

But...

“Yan Liang! Don’t think you can use the same move twice!” I yelled as I flashed her my confident smile and looked behind Yan Liang.

Hong was there and she was holding a dagger in her remaining arm.

“Wh—” Only now did Yan Liang realise something was wrong. But it was too late and she wouldn’t be able to defend in time.

“Yaaaaaaa!” Hong cried out as though she had infused all the pain that Yan Liang had given her into the dagger she held and stabbed—

“Wu!” Yan Liang’s smile completely vanished as Hong’s dagger slipped through Yan Liang’s red plate and buried itself deeply into her back.

“Kaa!” Blood flowed out of Yan Liang’s mouth, “You... Bastard!”

But in the next instant, Yan Liang swung out and knocked Hong to the ground with the last of her strength before dropping to the ground on her knees and panting hard as she lost her grip on her glaive.

She didn’t keel over even though she can’t continue fighting anymore. As expected of the most ferocious general in Hebei.

I sighed in amazement and looked at the battlefield. Hong can no longer fight but from how things look, we're winning and breaking down Wu Chao's gates is just a matter of time. As I thought so, I began walking towards Hong.

"B, big sis!" Hong yelled and pointed as she looked into the distance, "T, there!"

There?

I looked in the direction where Hong was pointing and saw a large cohort of Ben Chu's troops rushing towards us. I thought that it was strange and squinted my eyes to get a better look and found that the one leading this unit was Ben Chu herself.

Un? Is Xuan De here too?

He wasn't very noticeable but I could catch his figure sitting behind a warrior general on a white horse.

Hm hm, Xuan De has come to witness the showdown between I and Ben Chu huh!

Is that so, well in that case, it's time. I thought and tiredly raised my right hand and pointed at the sky.

Liu Bei POV

Un? Why does it feel like the ground is shaking? And it's pretty violent too...

"Zi Long! Did you hear something?"

"I heard it long ago already..." Zi Long sighed when she saw I only just realised this and pointed at the slope to the right, "We've been ambushed."

I turned and saw a continuous stream of cavalry troops charging down the slope.

How did it become like this!

"Ben Chu!" I hurriedly yelled out to her in the hopes that she could give an appropriate response to the ambush as soon as possible.

"Never fear, Xuan De!" Ben Chu yelled back as she raised her sabre and swept back her long, wavy hair, "We just need to charge at them!"

Chapter 22: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (14)

Liu Bei POV

As I looked over, I saw that I was just 1,000 paces away from Wu Chao, the closest I've been to the place.

As I looked, I could spot a battle that was ongoing and that Wu Chao was still not in flames yet. In reality, the supply cache Wu Chao was not particularly large, and was just an area that was fenced up by thick wood stakes.

And in the distance, I spotted Meng De. But even if she was close by, there was no way I could reach her.

Standing in front of me was her subordinate general Xu Huang, and at her sides were Yue Jin and Li Dian. Behind the 3 were a large unit of elite armoured cavalry.

"Xuan De, you better don't move at all later." Zi Long hurriedly slapped my head when she saw that I was ready to act, "I've never seen those 3 people before but I can assure you that they are not going to be easy to deal with."

"What is the meaning of this? Either attack or get lost." Ben Chu yelled out impatiently at Xu Huang.

I'd thought that Xu Huang would have just charged at Ben Chu but she only looked at Ben Chu with her empty eyed and neither spoke nor acted.

"The Imperial Chancellor has ordered us to stop anyone from coming through."

"Yuan Shao, forget about saving Wu Chao! We won't give you the opportunity."

Yue Jin and Li Dian explained.

And for some reason, Li Dian looked at me but before I could meet her eyes, she looked away.

"Alright, in that case—" Ben Chu said as she pointed her sabre at Xu Huang, "I'll just have get through you lot by force."

"That is if you have the power to do so—" Xu Huang said and readied her stance while Yue Jin and Li Dian drew their swords as well.

"Xuan De, we're moving to the back."

"Eh?"

Zi Long didn't bother paying heed to me and slowly retreated.

"Zi Long, aren't we going to help Ben Chu?"

“At the end of the day, this fight is between Yuan Shao and Cao Cao.” Zi Long turned and looked at me, puzzled at what I was saying, “Xuan De, we shouldn’t get too involved.”

Ah.

That’s right, who am I to get involved? And I even know how history will go but yet I’m still trying to change it.

Is it only because I stayed in Ben Chu’s camp for too long and grew attached? Or is it because the history here is different from what I know? Or am I just being delusional?

What can I do? What do I want to do?

“Yaa!” Ben Chu had already begun her charge at Xu Huang while I was still dealing with my internal conflicts.

“...”

Ding! *Ding* *Ding*!

As the 2 commanders crossed swords and clashed, so did both armies.

Zi Long only waited in a safe spot watching over the battlefield on a horse with me behind, and did not join the battle. Perhaps she felt that there was no need to join the fray, or perhaps it was because I was with her.

And the me now had no right to wager Zi Long’s life on a battle that had nothing to do with me.

Ding! *Cha*!

In the distance, I saw that Ben Chu was fighting all 3 generals at once and within a few bouts, she took a slash to her back.

!

Even though it was Ben Chu who got hurt, her pain was transmitted to my heart through my eyes.

“... Xuan De, can you please don’t look like that?”

“Un?”

I only realised that tears were streaming down my face when Zi Long suddenly spoke up to me.

“Hai, now I look like the bad guy here.” Zi Long sighed and raised her silver spear as she swung the reins.

Her destination was where Ben Chu was.

Meng De POV

“Siege unit! Get the battering rams ready!” Seeing that the defending troops were thinning out, I hurriedly issued a command to my troops who hurriedly began to prepare to break the gates of Wu Chao.

“Big sis...”

“Hong, don’t speak, save your strength.”

I did emergency first aid for Hong, and was able to stop the bleeding, and she was now lying down on my cape.

On the other side, Yan Liang was still alive but she lay motionless as she continued to bleed. Looking at her, I don’t think she can last longer than an hour.

“Big sis... Why didn’t you use fire arrows?”

“Un?”

“If you’d used fire arrows... We would have won... And it would have ended...”

...

Indeed, just as Hong said, if I’d used fire arrows from the start, I would have achieved victory then and there.

But, I can’t do that.

“No,” I said as I shook my head to Hog, “For this showdown, I can’t win too easily, nor can Ben Chu lose too easily either.”

I feel bad for Hong who was wounded but I made this decision a long time ago.

To enter Wu Chao, light up the torch and achieve victory. This must be done personally.

“Meng De!!” All of a sudden, a voice came from afar, “Meng De!!!”

I looked over, and wanted to smile but for some reason I couldn’t.

“Hong, rest easy now. When we get back, I’ll do something about your arm.”

I bade my farewell to Hong and tested my sword as I looked at that arrogant idiot.

Ben Chu, I’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time now.

Chapter 23: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (15)

Meng De POV

The sun was now high in the sky and the skies were clear and blue. In such weather, I should be setting aside my work and be out frolicking with my subordinate generals instead.

Yet, when met with this scene of violence, bloodshed, and slaughter, even if one wanted to play, they would lose their mood instantly. It's a good thing that I've already gotten used to seeing such things though, and won't feel nauseous in the least.

Whilst having such whimsical thoughts, I pointed my sword downwards as I stared right at the person before me.

She too put down her sword and stared back at me. As for what she could be thinking about now, my guess is as good as any.

But for some reason, seeing such a serious Ben Chu felt out-of-place.

"Meng De, you've really given me quite the thrashing in this battle." Ben Chu seemed to be saying exactly what she thought as she looked at me, "You got the Yellow Turbans on your side, convinced Zhang Xiu, and even got my strategist to betray me. Am I supposed to say, as expected of Meng De?"

"Hahaha, I'm not as formidable as you're making me to be."

"Nobody's praising you!" Seeing me accept her praise, she got angry instead but she soon got into a stance.

"How about it? Let's finish this with a duel."

"..." I'm confident of besting Ben Chu in a duel but my stamina is quite lacking now so I don't want to take the risk.

And besides, as long as I keep stalling for time, my troops will definitely be able to break Wu Chao. Xu Huang's units have intercepted Ben Chu's troops so the only one left here is Ben Chu herself. Even if I were to send ordinary soldiers against her in turn, Ben Chu would probably be unable to hold on.

But...

"Alright, I'll take that bet." Though my mind had arrived at the most logical choices, my actions betrayed my thoughts and I readied my stance, "Consider this a show of my respect for you."

Perhaps I'm still soft deep down.

Ben Chu wordlessly nodded and got into a stance that lowered her centre of gravity.

And in the next moment—

“Ka!” Ben Chu lunged forward as quick as an arrow and I hurriedly raised my sword to block.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!” She continued stabbing at me from close quarters, and as I dodged, I found that my strength was lacking and raised my sword to block the attacks I was unable to dodge.

But if it’s just this, then I can still deal with it.

Ben Chu’s moves are very orthodox and are often not adapted to suit the situation. As long as one knows Ben Chu’s attack patterns, one can easily create an opening and initiate a counterattack.

“Haa— Ha!” Just then, she suddenly stabbed at my head and I jumped backwards to avoid it.

“Hei!” She yelled out and did a mid-air turn and slashed down.

I blocked the blow and raised my leg to kick her abdomen but she was able to jump back in time and gain some distance before launching yet another wave of unbroken stabs yet again!

The pattern was there, but...

Her attacks are continuous and have no gap between each attack at all. Even if I know what she’s going to do, I have no room to think of how to exploit that and can only concentrate on defending.

Eh! It’s starting to take a toll on me. In just a few bouts, my stamina is almost completely drained.

Looks like the fight with Yan Liang took too much out of me. But Ben Chu was also fighting just as long as I was so why is she still so energetic?

“I got you now!”

“Ah...” I was momentarily stunned and misjudged the angle of Ben Chu’s stab, and by the time I corrected my block, her sword had already sunk into my shoulder.

“Ha!”

Si!

She pulled out her sword in an instant, and before I could recover from the shock of the pain, she swept my feet and I landed on the ground hard.

“Ka...”

“Stop resisting!” Just as I was about to get up, that sword was resting on my neck near my

throat.

Looks like this duel is over.

There are as many excuses as I want but the reality is that I lost, and I can't take back my decision to participate in the duel.

And there were essentially no issues with the strategies and tactics employed in this battle anyway. The only thing that was wrong were my personal feelings.

Feng Xiao, I'm really sorry.

"How about that, Meng De?! I've finally bested you!" Ben Chu proclaimed in between pants.

Perhaps she's been hoping to beat me a little too much.

Though it might be a stretch to call Ben Chu a hero, I ought to respect her just for that tenacity of hers.

"So what if you've won, Ben Chu?" I slowly smiled as I said so, "You've disrespected the Son of Heaven, brazenly and unilaterally established yourself as a feudal lord after occupying the 4 states in Hebei. How can you call yourself a loyal subject of the Great Han? And now you're going to slay a Court official serving her duties. Take care that you are not denounced by the people."

"Meng De," She smiled when she heard what I said, "You've seized control of the Son of Heaven and used the authority of the Emperor to control the feudal lords, slaughtered ordinary civilians wantonly, and dictated Court matters. Take care that the people do not spit at your grave."

We both sank into silence thereafter.

Well then Ben Chu, what will you do next? Kill me, and then be the one to lead the world?

That's actually not too bad since I don't need to work so hard anymore.

"Hmph, I absolutely hate that expression of Meng De's that's as though you've seen through everything." Just then, Ben Chu raised her sword from my neck, and gave a radiant smile.

"Let me tell you, Meng De." She said, and sat down, as though she wanted to engage me in a casual chat.

"I, Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu, have never had any intention of committing treason. I took Hebei only because I wanted to prove my superiority over you, a treacherous retainer who is by the side of the Son of Heaven." She then forcibly stabbed her sword into the ground before she continued, "I am a retainer of the Great Han so naturally I won't be killing you. But I have more than enough legitimate accusations, of which almost all are enough to get you off your position."

“Hahaha, that really is scary.” For some reason, I couldn’t help but feel that Ben Chu has become more mature.

I’d detected it on the mountain peak yesterday, but today, it was clear as day that Ben Chu had changed a lot since the feudal lord alliance.

Dadadada...

Un? From where is the sound of horse hooves coming from?

“Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu! I’ll be taking your life!”

I turned to the direction where the sound came from and saw not far off from behind Ben Chu, a girl with a steel helmet and a long spear, charging at Ben Chu.

Chapter 24: Don't tell me this is the Battle of Guandu (16)

Meng De POV

Ding *Ling* A clear crisp sound accompanied a blinding reflection. It seemed like the world was silent as the top of a silver spear slowly moved through the air.

And just ahead of that spear was Yuan Shao Yuan Ben Chu, who had neither turned her head nor regained her senses after getting drunk from victory.

Who is it!? Is it Ben Chu's subordinate general?

The situation did not afford me the time to think, and the pain and exhaustion made it difficult for me to think deeply anyway so I could only yell out at Ben Chu, "Ben Chu! Behind you!"

"Eh?" Ben Chu gave a silly response before quickly turning around, but it was all too late.

"Yaa!" The helmet girl bellowed to invigorate herself and stabbed at Ben Chu with her spear.

"My lord!"

I thought it would be over but a large red being suddenly flashed past my eyes and stood in front of the spear.



Was that... Yan Liang!?

Psh Before I could react, the sound of flesh being torn filled my ears.

I've spent a long time on the battlefield but this piercing sound still gave the me who was lying on the ground a shock.

I looked over and saw that Ben Chu was unharmed while in front of Ben Chu was Yan Liang who wore a set of red plate armour. Even though the spear was already stabbed into her throat, Yan Liang still grasped tightly onto the spear, and halted its movements altogether,

“Let go!”

“...”

The assailant roared out in anger and tried to pull out the spear. Yan Liang’s hands trembled and she suddenly yelled out and used the last of her strength—

Ka The spear broke in half.

“Kuh!” The subordinate general was shocked by what Yan Liang did but she released the broken spear in her hands and reached for the sword by her waist.

“Zhang He!”

“Ah!”

By now, Ben Chu had already regained her senses fully, and she used her sword to flick away the subordinate general’s sword.

I see, so that subordinate general is Zhang He. I carefully sized her up. She was slightly thin but she was healthy, and had very well-defined features. The only flaw she had on her was that helmet of hers.

Just by looking, I could tell that this wasn’t any ordinary general.

“Yan Liang...” Ben Chu kept her sword pointed at Zhang He as she approached Yan Liang.

“...”

Yan Liang had already suffered a grievous wound to her back, now her throat was pierced and the bleeding from this wound was even worse. She had already begun convulsing lightly but she still nodded at Ben Chu.

“Yan Liang, Yan Liang you must hold on.” Ben Chu began to grow frantic when she saw Yan Liang’s state and touched Yan Liang’s shoulders with trembling hands before looking at Zhang He with fury.

But Zhang He maintained a cold look as she spoke up, “Yuan Shao, what right do you have to stare at me like that?”

“You killed my subordinate general, and betrayed me, what right do I not have against you?!” Ben Chu’s sword reached Zhang He’s chest as she said so but Zhang He remained motionless at this.

“Hmph! I, Zhang He, have never betrayed anyone. I am only loyal to my lord, Han Fu, Governor of Ji state.” She snorted as she said so, “You, Yuan Shao, used despicable means to force my lord into a corner for which I am here for vengeance!”

“...” I’d thought Ben Chu would just kill her outright but who knew that she actually listened

to the end and remained silent before putting down the hand which held the sword.

"I was indeed careless with the matter of Han Fu. I explained this in the letter I had sent before."

"What's the use of an explanation when the person was already dead?"

"Kuh!" Ben Chu clicked her tongue very audibly as she rebutted, "In troubled times like these, wars and battles are commonplace and so are death and injury! I do respect your lord as a feudal lord yet why are you blaming me? Why not blame the era?!"

"Even in troubled times, righteousness and honour still exists! And I will live for the path of righteousness that I believe in!" Zhang He lunged at Ben Chu as she said so.

"You bastard!" Ben Chu was taken by surprise and they both landed on the ground and began exchanging blows with each other, "At the end of the day, what did Han Fu give you? Why are you so loyal to her?!"

"Han Fu may not be a wise ruler, but she is not power-hungry and does things well enough, so what's wrong with her? Even if she was not a good ruler, did she have to meet with that sort of end?!"

"These are troubled times! Heroes are born in troubled times and all that are left are sacrifices!"

The 2 were still fighting as they squabbled.

Troubled times and righteousness huh, the truth is that these are just very useful excuses.

Because it's troubled times, I can commit unlawful acts; because it's righteous, I'll follow through with it till the end.

But what is it really? Merely misguided fixation and excuses to act the way they want.

... Ben Chu, you better thank me for this.

"Zhang He!!" I yelled out as I thought so, "Does your path of righteousness stop at Han Fu's death?"

"What!?" Zhang He stopped fighting with Ben Chu when she heard the words I yelled out with all the strength I could muster.

"Han Fu is already dead. Even if you get your vengeance, have you thought about what to do after that?"

"After that, I'll... But that's what my righteousness is about, so I'm not changing this decision no matter what!"

"Alright, let me give you a suggestion..." I smiled as I said so. When dealing with this kind of

stubborn person, only only 1 method works, “You just need to continue on your path of righteousness.”

That method is to grant them a new objective, and hope.

“Eh?”

“I’m not asking you to forget about Han Fu’s vengeance, but I hope that you can think about letting your path of righteousness continue on after Han Fu,” I smiled as I said so to boost my confidence, “These are troubled times yes, but they will end at some point. And if the times can change, what reason is there that you cannot move on?”

“...” Zhang He sank into silence but she did not get up from Ben Chu below her. None of us spoke as we stood where we were motionlessly. Only after Ben Chu’s other troops made it here after a few minutes did Zhang He leave.

Thereafter, my troops came from the other side. Yuan Rang still wanted to continue, but I saw that it was getting late and I was worried about Hong so I just gathered up my troops and ordered them to retreat.

I don’t know if Ben Chu thought of the same thing as I did, but she didn’t chase after me when I retreated and returned to their own camp as well.

It was a long day and I’m really tired. But I’m still alive and though my companions have sustained heavy injuries, they are still alive and that’s enough for me.

(Author’s note: This chapter is more of a closing piece rather than an actual last chapter to the Battle of Guandu. And so, the Battle of Guandu is now more or less over. Thereafter will be something like an aftermath which does not have any battle scenes. I personally feel that the ending is a bit lacking and I wasn’t able to include everything I wanted to. Some stuff I left out include Cheng Yu, Man Chong, and Cao Ren’s illustrious battle logs. I will see if I can include these other short stories so keep a look out for those. Because we’re going to enter the Liu Biao chapter soon, please do look forward to what will come and continue to read this story.

PS: I haven’t forgotten about Yun Chang’s journey and will be continuing with that until the end of this volume.)

Chapter 25: Don't tell me this is Feng Xiao's last mission

Meng De POV

After we had gathered back at camp and counted our losses, I found that even though the battle went almost perfectly for our side, we didn't really get a decisive advantage.

Though we did reduce their numbers by a lot more than our losses, our troop morale is spent. Our supplies are running low as before, and the Qing state soldiers are getting restless as Zhang Xiu's loyalty is beginning to waver.

As for Cao Hong, her arm was no good by the time she made it to the city. I have no choice but to send her to Professor Ma Jun and see if she can do anything.

(TL: Ma Jun is a mechanical engineer and scientist. Yes you read that right, an engineer and scientist in AD 200+. No, technology isn't going to go all haywire here. Ma Jun was an innovator who came up with normal useful mechanical stuff related to gears and hydraulics. The honorific used here is 先生 which is Mr or sensei so I translated it as professor.)

But fate bestowed by the heavens is truly unpredictable. It has only been 1 day since we left the encampment but Feng Xiao who had been attending to military affairs is already...

I clenched my fist as I paced up and down outside Feng Xiao's room.

Hai, Feng Xiao, is this where your path will end?

After a short while, the military physician came out and I hurriedly went up to ask him how she was but when I saw his helpless look, I could already guess what the answer would be.

"Physician..."

"I know what the Imperial Chancellor wants to know. Physician Hua Tuo has attended to Lord Guo Jia's problems before and instructed Lord Guo Jia not to tire herself or get agitated." The physician shook his head as he continued, "But it's easier said than done. With a war going on, everyone will inevitably have a lot of work on their hands and it is impossible to convince Lord Guo Jia to wind down and rest."

"But before we set out, Feng Xiao clearly said that she would leave everything to Man Chong..."

Ah.

Now that I think about it, could that be Feng Xiao's will? The one who's always been busy with work was Feng Xiao as usual after all.

"C, can I go and see Feng Xiao?"

"... Un." The physician nodded at me with a sorrowful look as he replied.

I took a deep breath, tidied my clothing, and stepped in.

“Feng Xiao, I’m here to see you.” I said so the moment I entered and when I turned my head, I saw Feng Xiao in a white gown sitting up on the bed. Her face was, by now, pale as a sheet.

“What is my lord saying now? You’ve been pacing about outside for a while now. Are you trying to irritate me to death?”

“How could I have such an intent...” When I heard Feng Xiao’s sarcastic words, I felt much more sorrowful than put off and bowed deeply as I saluted her.

“What deeds and merits have I accomplished that the Imperial Chancellor is showing such courtesy to me?” Feng Xiao said as she got out of bed, wore her plain cloth shoes and came to help me up.

“Haha, don’t come and act all polite with me.” I laughed as I held her hands.

Her hands were trembling, and her hands touched me, I felt a distinct chill on my arms. What cold hands. They are so much colder than how they usually are.

“Hai~ I’m really envious of the cold hands Feng Xiao has. When summer arrives, it would be great to have Feng Xiao by my side.”

“Haha, my lord really knows how to joke. How could I possibly last till summer?”

Feng Xiao only laughed self-deprecatingly as my words of support and bent down to help me up.

“I’m actually very happy that my lord has come to see me. I have the important mission of conquering Wuhuan after this so I’m afraid I won’t be able to see everyone again.”

“Feng Xiao, you don’t actually have to bother with Wuhuan. Just stay and rest. I’ll put someone else in charge.” As I finished, I wanted to gesture to summon a subordinate general in but Feng Xiao grabbed my hand and stopped me.

“No, this is the path I have chosen. Even if I have come to the end of it, I will keep walking.” Feng Xiao smiled and set aside her usual sarcastic, mocking look, revealing a kind expression for the first time. She then continued as she looked at me, “Come on my lord, you should smile. This face doesn’t seem like you at all.”

I don’t know what kind of face I have on now but it’s probably a difficult and uneasy one. Showing a natural-seeming relaxed expression can sometimes be impossible.

“...” I sank into silence, and didn’t want to accept the reality before me. If it weren’t for my status and the need for face, I would have thrown a tantrum and made a scene by now.

But, I am Cao Cao.

“Alright, I got it, I won’t stop you. If you want to go to Wuhuan then go.” I smiled and grasped Feng Xiao’s hands as I resolved myself to give her a final farewell.

“My lord, before I set off, I have some words of advice.”

“Un, go ahead, Feng Xiao.”

“First, Xun Yu and Cheng Yu are extraordinarily talented individuals. They should be promoted and can be relied on when I’m not around anymore. Secondly, though this battle may have ended in a draw, the north is more or less ours. I advise you to focus on Jing state in the south before taking Xichuan and thereafter Sun Wu. Thirdly Liu Bei may seem unremarkable but he will definitely leave his mark in history and you must guard against him. The world is still in chaos and whatever path you should take, whatever is right or wrong; in the end, it is my lord’s decision...”

Ke!! *Ke* *Ke*!!!

After finishing everything she wanted to say in 1 breath, Feng Xiao violently coughed and blood flowed out from between her fingers as she tried to cover her mouth.

At this, I could only hug Feng Xiao tightly and silently rub her back.

“Un, I got it. You don’t need to say any more...”

Feng Xiao’s coughing continued for a while, and eventually stopped but she continued to tremble uncontrollably.

Chapter 26: Don't tell me this is the aftermath of the Battle of Guandu (1)

Liu Bei POV

The Battle of Guandu was so intense that even now, a few days after it all ended, I could still see it clearly in my mind.

In the past few days, many of Ben Chu's subordinates clamoured for her to attack but Ben Chu did not do anything. Though she said she wanted to rest and recover, I get that the feeling that she has some other motive. That said, the losses were tremendous and though her troops still outnumbered Meng De's, the numerical advantage was greatly reduced.

Yan Liang's back and throat were pierced, and if she were any ordinary person, she would have probably died but she was able to make it back to the main encampment and the physicians were able to save her. The only permanent damage she suffered was to her vocal chords.

But for Yan Liang, what troubled her more was that she could not drink liquor.

Besides all this, the betrayals have had a very detrimental impact on troops morale. Guo Tu was executed on the spot while Zhang He was currently locked up and awaiting trial but she probably can't escape an execution.

As I mentioned before, Ben Chu probably had a reason for calling a temporary ceasefire and this probably was a result of her interaction with Meng De while the 2 of them were fighting.

To the both of them, it was an imperative to win the Battle of Guandu yet Meng De has not acted either since that day even though it isn't clear who has won. If there isn't some conspiracy behind by the 2 of them, then it must mean that the Battle of Guandu is over.

"Ow! Xuan De, can you not get distracted?!"

"Ah! S, sorry, Zi Long." I got a shock from Zi Long and continued wrapping the bandages carefully and gingerly.

That day, Zi Long had taken on Xu Huang, Yue Jin and Li Dian on her own while carrying the burdensome me along. After several dozen bouts, Zi Long was still standing strong and stayed on until the reinforcing troops were able to arrive. Despite being outnumbered and having to drag a burden along, Zi Long only sustained several slashes on her arm.

"Xuan De, this is the last time I'm doing something like this. I will not do something stupid like this another time."

"Un, I won't do this again." I smiled bitterly and then curiosity piqued me and I asked, "Come to think of it, what do you think about those 3 people's martial prowess?"

“Those 3 huh. The leader, the one with the cold face is extraordinarily strong. I couldn’t read her moves at all. The one behind with a hat and a lighthearted expression is not as good, you can tell that she just has a self-taught style. The weakest one is the one with a hat and a serious face. Every move of hers feels very rigid and predictable, as though they were taken straight out of a military training manual.” Zi Long said and then started laughing, “To be honest, it was actually better for me that they all came at once. If it were just cold face, it would have been even more difficult to read and anticipate what she would do. On the other hand, because you were behind me, most of the attacks were directed at you so it was easy to predict where the attacks were going to come from.”

So their primary target was me huh. But now that I think about it, if I happened to die by a stray sword or spear, Zi Long could have just retreated after that.

“In any case, thanks Zi Long. It’s been hard on you.”

“Whether it’s difficult or not doesn’t matter. Xuan De has to understand who he is.”

Eh?

Zi Long ignored her half-bandaged state and saluted me when she finished.

“You are now my lord, and I may protest your orders, I must obey them in the end. So Xuan De should not mind such things.”

She only raised her arms after she finished. I, however, was embarrassed and moved by what she said and my hands that continued to bandage her began to tremble.

“... I’m back. After counting the numbers, we have about 1-200 casualties but we should be able to replenish these numbers over the next couple of days.” Just then, Gong You who had been busy with military administrative affairs and logistics came back.

She looked at Zi Long’s injuries and began to lecture me again, “... My lord must remember not to ever endanger yourself again. Both I and General Zhao Yun are responsible for this gaffe.”

“Ah, I got it. Thanks for your concern, Gong You.”

Gong You nodded, and then went to the side to help make tea.

At least it was just Gong You. If Yun Chang were around, she would probably talk my ear off.

“Ah, my lord, Lord Yuan Shao’s courier just came to look for me and asked you to come to the main tent in a while for some important matters.”

“Eh? Me?”

Gong You nodded.

Important matters? And she’s seeking my advice?

I actually haven't seen Ben Chu these few days. After we all returned to camp, she stayed by Yan Liang's side. Thereafter, I heard that she personally went to speak to some rank and file officials and troops but heard no further news after that.

That is to say, this meeting will be the first time I'm seeing Ben Chi after the battle.

I wonder why Ben Chu is looking for me, I thought as I entered the main tent.

"Ah, Imperial Uncle is here."

When I entered, I was greeted with familiar faces all round. On the left was Feng Ji and Shen Pei, on the right was Tian Feng and Ju Shou, perhaps Xu You was in some corner too. Feng Ji was currently standing with the support of Shen Pei as she couldn't sit. The one who first addressed me was also Feng Ji.

In front was Ben Chu who was holding a piece of silk in her hands and had a curious expression on her. She didn't look sad but she wasn't happy either. It felt like she was just calm. The seat that Ben Chu was sitting on no longer had any elevation, and the decorations were much plainer.

"Umm, what is it that Ben Chu has summoned me for?"

Sensing the tension in the atmosphere, I didn't dare to dawdle and went straight into the issue at hand.

"Un..." Ben Chu sighed and raised the hand which held the silk and shook it in the air, "I got a letter from Meng De's side today. The contents were basically requesting me to surrender and in return, I will be appointed General-in-Chief."

"Eh? General-in-Chief?"

"My lord, I must say this. Though the position of General-in-Chief is 1 of the 3 Excellency positions, it is only important in name. Back when the first Emperor built the nation, he created the position of Grand Commandant which was the previous name of General-in-Chief but never really established a role for the position. Cao Cao's plan to appoint my lord as General-in-Chief is nothing but a cheap ploy to appease you while taking away your lands and power."

Tian Feng ignored me and came up to put her view across. Looking at the others, I think this isn't the first time she's saying this.

When Ben Chu saw this, she calmly raised her palm to Tian Feng.

"Yuan Hao, let's listen to Xuan De's view first." As she finished, she looked at me and waited for my answer.

Chapter 27: Don't tell me this is the aftermath of the Battle of Guandu (2)

Liu Bei POV

Honestly, I'm not too knowledgeable on the Battle of Guandu. All I know is mainly the key events such as the Battle of Wu Chao. And how after Wu Chao, Yuan Shao is decisively defeated by Cao Cao.

So in short, this battle is one of overturning numerical disadvantages and ending in total victory for Cao Cao.

But now the Battle of Wu Chao here has ended in a draw, how then should things be settled?

This shouldn't actually be up to me, but for some reason, it is.

I frowned as I looked at the administrative officials and Ben Chu, whose face revealed no clues as to what I ought to say, and felt an intense pain in my stomach from the pressure that also made breathing difficult.

Haa...

"Ben Chu."

"Xuan De, if you have anything to say, just say it without worry." Ben Chu's face was strangely serious, and this extended to her eyes, as she folded her arms and gave a relaxed look that seemed to tell me that she would accept anything I would say.

But even so, I really don't know what I should say.

"What does Ben Chu think of Meng De?" I gathered my courage and said this, hoping to get Ben Chu's thoughts and following on from there.

"Meng De is a treacherous retainer of the Great Han. As a descendent of an illustrious noble family, I ought to remove her."

"Then, what of the Son of Heaven?"

"The Son of Heaven is still young, and is unable to rule on his own, and thus should be supported by a decisive yet loyal retainer while the Son of Heaven is still young and hand over power in future."

"Wu..."

Speaking of which, this is the first time I'm hearing Ben Chu speak in formal Court speak. But after listening to this, I understand what Ben Chu means— Ben Chu intends on taking control of Court and support the Son of Heaven herself.

But is it really alright for me to say this?

If I do, then the war will clearly continue on. And history will likely return to its original path. Perhaps, it's because it's history that it will be like that.

"Then in that case..." I said slowly, as I formed the words carefully from my thoughts, "Ben Chu should—"

Eh? Wait... Something doesn't feel right... If Ben Chu really thinks that way, then why did she need to seek my opinion?

Should the history I know, be the history here? Is the history here really the one I know?

It seems the same in some places, but not in others.

Then—

Could it be that this history will be different?

Could it be that history will be influenced by my decisions here and now?

Then—

"... Ben Chu, I still have 1 question to ask before giving you my reply."

"... Ask away Xuan De."

She acted, spoke, and looked the same as usual but the Ben Chu now, was different from before. She was so much more quiet, and mature.

"Ben Chu," I paused, and then asked the one daring question I thought of, "If Meng De is a treacherous retainer, and if the Son of Heaven requires a loyal retainer to support him, then who is the one most suitable to support the Son of Heaven?"

Un? The moment the question came out, several of Ben Chu's retainers looked dissatisfied.

"Imperial Uncle, our lord has said it plainly enough, do you really need to ask?" Feng Ji said with an irritated look, as though she was speaking to an ignorant child.

On the other side, Tian Feng said something disdainfully as well, and turned her head away.

Just then—

"Meng De." From the position directly in front of me, a clear and resolute voice could be heard.

"Only Meng De can rule the world in place of the Son of Heaven." Ben Chu said again, in an even more resolute voice. And thereafter, Ben Chu smiled.

... Hu. And I, unlike the others, heaved a sigh of relief.

Perhaps that's the way things are meant to be. Ben Chu should know that she is not as capable as Meng De, and if she should take her place, the world would descend into greater chaos.

At the end of the day, the Battle of Wu Chao probably doesn't hold any strategic value to Ben Chu. She was just following through on her desire to defeat Meng De, and it just so happens that Meng De followed along and made a bet as well.

Though the wager, and the cost, for both sides was a little too large.

And so, after a small commotion, Ben Chu decided to take the path of reconciliation.

The next day, I accompanied Ben Chu as a middle man of sorts, to the agreed negotiation point that Ben Chu and Meng De had agreed upon before.

All I want to ask is— Has history really changed?

Chapter 28: Don't tell me this is the aftermath of the Battle of Guandu (3)

TL: Back to Yun Chang's journey all the way till end of the volume after this.

Liu Bei POV

We were now in a hilly region in the north. The extensive plains in Guandu were rare in this region but the sort of towering cliffs we were at now were rare.

We're so high up. I haven't studied geography, but I think this cliff is about 1,000 meters up.

Hai, how will this end?

I turned and looked at the 2 people who were silently facing each other, and shook my head. The one on the left was wearing the standard, formal official uniform with a smile on her face while the one on the right wore a luxurious, thick gown with hatred dripping from her expression.

This matter really has nothing to do with me but it seems like, as Imperial Uncle, I just need to stand here and something will happen.

"Ben Chu, I should praise you for being able to recognise what is important."

"Hmph!" Ben Chu lightly scoffed at Meng De's provocation.

Thereafter, Ben Chu raised her sleeve and extracted 4 seals 1 by 1, and placed them on a flattish rock at the side.

"The official seals for the 4 states of Hebei are here. It's yours now, Meng De."

"..." Meng De remained smiling silently, and took out a piece of silk and an official seal from her breastpocket which she placed on the rock.

Then, Meng De spoke up, "This is the letter of appointment by the Son of Heaven and the official seal of the General-in-Chief. In return, your state seals for the 4 states will be returned to Court."

"That is to say I no longer have the right to command and raise an army then?" Ben Chu spat out what she thought with a cold face.

If that is how it is going to be, then we should have heeded Tian Feng's words.

"And if I were to say that is the case?" Meng De replied.

"..." Ben Chu did not reply, and sank into silence. After a few seconds, Meng De laughed out loud all of a sudden.

“Hahahaha! Look at that face of yours!” Meng De laughed as she pointed at Ben Chu’s serious face, and took out another piece of silk from her breastpocket, “This is the letter of appointment for the new Governors of the 4 states. They’re all your people, I didn’t change any of your previous appointments.”

Meng De placed the piece of silk on top of the one before, and then places the General-in-Chief’s seal on top of both pieces of silk when a breeze blew.

“Meng De, I really hate that face and mouth of yours.” Ben Chu said as she lowered her glance to the piece of silk, “Tian Feng, Governor of Ji state; Ju Shou, Governor of You state; Shen Pei, Governor of Qing state; and Feng Ji, Governor of Bing state huh?”

“Yes. Those 4 are your most loyal retainers, no?”

“But Meng De, their official positions in Court are low, how did you...”

“I’m a treacherous official in troubled times, and those 4 girls have achieved much after all, so I was able to make it work somehow.”

Meng De has once again taken up the mantle of a treacherous retainer on her own, but even with that, she must have gone to great lengths to accomplish all this.

But putting it another way, since Meng De has gotten these appointment letters ready, that means that Meng De has already predicted this ending.

As I thought so, I looked at Ben Chu’s dissatisfied and unhappy face, and saw that she had come to the same conclusion as I have.

And in the next moment, Ben Chu retained her serious air, and slowly knelt as she held the seals and the letters and raised them above her head.

“I, servant of the Han, accept the orders of the Son of Heaven!” Ben Chu yelled out. She then got up and looked at Meng De with vigor and said, “I am the descendent of an illustrious noble family. Though I may be an official of the same level as you, I am different.”

“Un, I know.” In contrast with Ben Chu’s seriousness, Meng De’s smile never left. Even her replies seemed discretionary and even mocking.

Was this contempt to Ben Chu?

“... Hai,” Just as I had this thought in mind, Ben Chu heaved a sigh of relief, “When I think about how I’ll have to go to Court with you, I feel like I can’t vent all my anger now since we have a long way to go after all.”

“Hahaha, I respectfully await anything you might throw my way.”

I don’t know if they are sincere, but at this moment, the both of them were smiling at each other. Both smiles were filled with confidence and nobility. Even though it’s supposed to be

a compromise, the result seemed to signal a bright future ahead. And behind this radiance was a weird feeling that these 2 weren't enemies at all.

Hai, so what exactly were these 2 to each other huh...

I don't know, but at least the war is over. What made me surprised was that Meng De and Ben Chu would be going to Court together.

This was something I had never seen nor imagined before.

Meng De POV

"Hahaha!" I laughed from the bottom of my heart on the way back.

Ben Chu is going to be joining me at Court huh... Things are going to get interesting again huh.

"Oi!" All of a sudden, a silver figure flew out and stopped in front of me.

I hurriedly pulled on my reins and stopped before the one in front of me.

"Are you Cao Cao Cao Meng De!?" She showed no fear even though she very nearly died just now.

Who is this...

She had well-defined features and a good figure but had a very unsightly helmet on...

Zhang He?

(TL: Cao Cao had, in the original, tried to give this position along with others to Yuan Shao to appease Yuan Shao when Cao Cao took the position of Imperial Chancellor to appease Yuan Shao while they were still allies nominally. This happened before Guandu.)

(TL: This really shows Meng De's brilliance. In order to get her subordinates to accept this result, she had to make sure that she didn't win, and Ben Chu didn't lose, by too much.)

Chapter 29: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (6)

Yun Chang POV

The days were getting colder and colder, probably in part due to our journey taking us progressively norther as we advanced.

As I thought so, I hugged my green robes. I didn't accept Lord Cao Cao's kind intentions then, and it seems like I'm just self-flagellating. No matter what, one cannot get through the wintry cold just by willpower alone.

Even since we've left Dongling Pass, we've been on the road for 3-4 days now. I don't know if it's our luck or that these parts are generally unpopulated, but we haven't come across a single village or town where we could stop and rest.

It was still fine for us. I, Hua Tuo and Wen Yuan can live with camping out, and Lu Bu can even sleep while she's riding. But this isn't good for Gan Qing and Mi Zhen. If we have to keep staying out in the wilderness or keep travelling, they will fall ill eventually.

"Achoo!" Just then, Meng Huo, who was beside me, shivered as he gave a loud sneeze and mucus dripped from his nose.

Meng Huo was shivering uncontrollably as he rubbed his hands over his body which was covered by several pieces of thin cloth and looking ahead with lifeless eyes.

Beside him, Lady Zhurong, Ahuina and Dongtuna were wrapped in thick beast hides and fur that made one feel warm just looking at them.

"My lady... Can I please have 1 piece..." Meng Huo pleaded as he extended a thin arm out, looking exceptionally pitiful as he did so.

"..." Unfortunately, this was not enough to move Lady Zhurong as she coldly said without even looking at him, "Isn't being able to keep your most beloved woman warm from the chilly cold the greatest happiness for a big man like you?"

That is right... But we're here on a leisure trip... Meng Huo moved his lips but he could not form the words as he was soundly convinced and could only continue on as he was.

And as for our side—

"My lord, my lord, you can't sleep here! You will catch a cold!"

"Wen Yuan! You bastard! Keep drinking!"

Oi oi oi. I shook my head.

At this time, everyone seems to have loosened up. Lu Bu wasn't the sort who could remain

serious for long to begin with and Wen Yuan was fully occupied with taking care of Lu Bu.

Looks like I can only depend on myself. I silently nodded, and took out the map from Wen Yuan's pouch which hung by her saddle and inspected it.

Un... If we continue downstream, we should reach Luoyang before long. I shifted my glance away from the map and looked into the distance.

That said, there are only dense low forests around...

Un?

In the distance, columns of smoke rose up to the skies.

That's!

I swung the reins and galloped forward.

Somewhere ahead of us stood city walls that weren't too tall.

City walls that weren't too tall... Did I really say that?

Now that I'm closer, isn't this close to 10 meters already?

(TL: Don't think I've ever said this, but the author has used the metric system for lengths (thank God or whoever). I won't be bothering to translate any other measurements unless they have any specific story importance and will just modernise if need be like times.)

"What tall city walls, I wonder if our Nanman troops can scale them." Lady Zhurong said as she looked at the city walls.

Back when Luoyang was burned down, it seems like only these walls remained. At that time, I hadn't thought they were much but now that they stand in my way, they seem a lot more formidable.

Speaking of which, I wonder how Luoyang city is like now, and the progress of restoration efforts.

"Yun Chang, what do we do?" Wen Yuan asked as she squinted at the city walls.

How could I possibly have a solution for this...

"Whatever the case, we should speak to the Administrator first." As I said so, I readied myself to yell out but I suddenly remembered what happened at Dongling Pass and hurriedly turned to Meng Huo and the rest.

"Umm, Lord Meng Huo."

“Ah-ah-ah-ah? Wh, what is it?!” Meng Huo replied between his chattering teeth with lifeless eyes.

“Ah, un, in a while when I speak with the Administrator, don’t get your troops to charge out. I intend on settling things in a more peaceful manner.”

“Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, I understand ah-ah-ah...”

... Will it really be alright? I’m still a bit worried but I still cupped my hands to my mouth and raised my head as I yelled out at the city–

“We are Imperial Uncle Liu’s subordinate generals and are on our way to reunite with the Imperial Uncle! We wish to borrow passage through your city and hope you may let us though!”

My voice continued to echo in the air even after I finished.

I’d thought that someone in the towers would ask if we had a permit, but nothing came from the city even after the echoes died down.

The coldness got even worse in such an awkward atmosphere.

Come on, even if you don’t intend on letting us pass, at least reply. If you don’t, we can’t even proceed with negotiations.

“Yun Chang, this is...” I frowned at Wen Yuan’s question and rubbed my hair.

Is the other side planning to wait us out? If that’s the case, then we have met with the worst possible scenario...

Guu!!!!

Un?

Just as I was thinking about how to deal with this situation– The gates opened up.

Chapter 30: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (7)

Yun Chang POV

I don't think I'm particularly old. My body is sturdy and I don't get sick easily. Though it's strange for me to say this, but I don't think I'll have difficulties bearing children as well.

But for some reason, I'm starting to see things.

Could they be letting us pass just like that? No, that's far too easy.

"Yun Chang! Don't daze out now."

Eh?

Wen Yuan's words pulled me back to reality and I looked ahead and saw a man with a goatee wearing plate and hundreds, maybe thousands, of troops behind him.

Th, this is!

"Blade girl, we haven't attacked them yet, but now they're going to come for us right off the bat." Lady Zhurong said as she narrowed her eyes in dissatisfaction.

I completely forgot about this possibility, but now that I think about it, this does make sense.

"No, we can't be sure of that yet." Though I said that, I was still very worried about the possibility, and hurriedly spoke to Wen Yuan, "Get ready for combat, but don't forget that protecting the carriage is of paramount importance."

As I said so, I looked at Lu Bu, who looked like she had just awoken and was currently supporting her face with one hand and rubbing her eyes with the other.

The soldiers we had brought along looked terribly exhausted as they hadn't had a chance to rest for a while now.

"What do we do? Should I call the Nanman troops out?" Lady Zhurong spoke to me on behalf of Meng Huo who was almost frozen by now.

"Un..."

This is really bad... Our troops morale is low, and if they charge at us, we need the Nanman troops to help us. But if we do that, then our road ahead will become more complicated.

"May I ask! Is it General Guan Yu?!"

My thoughts were still in turmoil but reality didn't give me any leeway to consider my

options as the goatee man had already advanced to not more than 100 paces away and yelled out to me.

At this, I could only give a reply.

"I am indeed Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang." I saluted as I said so to appear as respectful as I could.

The man continued to advance. He looked like a warrior general and had horizontal eyebrows with a small scar on his face. His plate armour wasn't customised and was merely a set of plain plate armour issued to rank and file soldiers.

Instead of plain, it would be more appropriate to call it austere.

"So it's Lord Guan Yu huh!" After confirming my identity, he actually smiled and saluted me, "I've been awaiting everyone for a while now. Please come in, let us rest before we speak any further."

If what I saw before was a delusion, then what is this?

We dismounted and followed the goatee man as we slowly stepped into Luoyang city, our destination being the Administrator residence.

We haven't explained anything at all, but we have allowed in already. This is far beyond what I would expect a reasonable Administrator would do.

Could they be hatching a plot behind this...

Wen Yuan signalled this to me with her eyes. I too felt the same way but there wasn't much to suspect about since they allowed us all to enter.

"May I ask how I should address the Administrator?"

"I am the Administrator of Luoyang, Han Fu. I am a lowly official and not worth remembering." He looks proper and speaks humbly. There are no signs which raise suspicion in me.

(TL: Reminder that this is another Han Fu, unrelated to the previous Han Fu in volume 1-2.)

Instead of suspecting him, I was more preoccupied with my shock at Luoyang's development.

I'd seen Luoyang city before and after it was burned down, and now that I've had a good look at it, it seems like it's been mostly retored to how it was before. The only thing it lacked was the vibrancy it had before, but this would probably come back as life got more stable and prosperous.

"This is it, we're here."

Before we knew it, it seems like we've reached our destination. We looked in the direction where he pointed— And only saw a row of ordinary residences.

W, were these the official mansions?

"Ah, I'll be honest, we've devoted almost all of our resources into revitalising Luoyang so we could only afford to build such housing for ourselves." As he said so, he flashed a plain smile.

"It is hard enough to find an official like Lord Han Fu who works hard for the people. I, Yun Chang, truly respect you for this and your thriftiness!" I lowered my head as I said so, in a show of respect which I had for the man.

"Something doesn't feel right." Just then, Wen Yuan spoke up as she frowned and looked about with suspicion, "Compared to his broken and old plate armour on the outside, the clothing he is wearing on the inside is a bit too luxurious and intricate..."

Too luxurious?

I looked at Han Fu when I heard what Wen Yuan said and found that that was indeed the case. At first glance, his inner clothing didn't seem like much, but when you took a closer look, you could see that there was a coloured embroidered pattern on it. This was clearly not something that could be procured cheaply.

"Everyone," Just as I was beginning to get suspicious, Han Fu interrupted my thoughts, "Let us go in first before we discuss the matter of crossing the Pass."

Chapter 31: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (8)

Yun Chang POV

As we brought Gan Qing, Mi Zhen and Hua Tuo into the residence, we saw that the furnishings were really simple and crude as well.

An ordinary household would have some extra cutlery and bowls about, or perhaps other stuff lying about, but because this was the guest room, it appears that these have been deemed unneeded and are not present. The only things in this room were a table, and some thin cushions.

"Everyone, let me introduce you." Han Fu walked in first and gestured as someone came out slowly from behind the curtains leading to the inner residence.

This person did not look as decent as Han Fu, and had glazed over eyes, a somewhat hunched back and a 人-shaped moustache. He wore the same sort of dilapidated plate armour as Han Fu. Because of what Wen Yuan said before, I looked at the gown he wore inside, and saw that it was plain and had nothing unusually ornate like Han Fu's.

"This is my second-in-command, Meng Tan."

"I've heard of everyone's esteemed names for a while now. That I, a lowly official, should be able to meet with you all is something thankful." Meng Tan bowed deeply as he said so.

In response, we bowed as well. Meng Huo and the rest of the Nanman didn't know about such customs and just sat down as they looked about lazily.

"Meng Tan, go make some tea."

"Yes, I will go at once." Meng Tan bowed and left.

When they heard that there was tea, Meng Huo and the rest of the Nanman seemed to have gotten excited as they engaged in a flurry of secret discussions with a gleam in their eyes.

By right, they should have tea or something similar where they came from... Or perhaps, this is a misconception of mine.

"Let's leave everything else aside first and speak about the matter of crossing the pass." Han Fu said with a serious look after Meng Tan left, "I've heard about it already and the mess you all created before."

"Un, we're really ashamed about what happened. There were some circumstances behind that back then." I did my best to make things as unclear as possible as what happened back at Dongling Pass wasn't something that could be just waved away with 'some circumstances'

after all.

I'd thought Han Fu would probe further when I used such language but he actually accepted it easily without suspicion at all.

"Un, I understand Lord Guan Yu's troubles." He gave a wide smile that made his eyes narrow.

Perhaps it's me being biased, but this smile raised some red flags.

"Then does the Administrator intend on letting us pass or not?" Lu Bu went straight into the main topic, perhaps because she had just fully awoken and couldn't hold back anymore. Looking at her face, you could still see a long red mark made from the horse's mane pressed against her face from when she fell asleep. That was really embarrassing.

At this question, Han Fu paused and sank into silence, and laughed as though he were trying to hide something. This smile seemed extremely unnatural and odd. Unlike when we first met, the air of sincerity and decency seemed to have disappeared.

But no matter what, I can't say such things. Perhaps this is how Han Fu is usually. Instead of such things, I'm more concerned about his answer.

It wasn't just me either, everyone else was waiting with bated breaths. In this room, the only sound that could be heard was Han Fu's laughter. Even Mi Zhen was, at this moment, staring quietly and fixedly at the goatee man.

"Ah, that huh." He gave another laugh and stopped before continuing, "Of course I can let you pass. I've respected you esteemed generals for a long time now, and will not stop you all."

Of course I can. Will not stop you all.

I only realised what those words meant after they reverberated in my ears for a long while. So that means we can pass then.

Hu.

I, Wen Yuan, Hua Tuo, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen heaved a sigh of relief. As for the rest, they were either oblivious or didn't care how they needed to get through the pass.

"Then when can we leave?" Wen Yuan asked in a refreshing voice that carried her intention to leave as soon as possible.

"Ah, ah!" Han Fu was clearly shocked, and hurriedly said, "You all can leave now."

"I understand. Thank you very much for your understanding, Administrator. We will be leaving immediately then, to prevent troubling the Administrator further." I helped Gan Qing up after I finished.

“But... Ah! Wait, I’m not done yet!”

“Eh? What other matter does the Administrator have with us?”

Han Fu hurriedly got up and pulled us who had gotten up and were ready to leave, perhaps he was surprised at our reaction.

“Ah... No, umm...” Even though he had stopped us, he was stammering and kept stealing glances toward the inner residence.

“Ah, if it’s the tea, we don’t need it.”

“That’s right, you can just give us the tea leaves if you want.” Meng Huo said from behind us. I used my eyes to tell him to be quiet but he clearly didn’t understand. Or rather he wasn’t even looking at me.

“An, ah! Of course I can. It’s just that... This...”

Report! Just as he was still blabbering, a military courier came running in.

“Don’t be alarmed! Report what it is you have to report!”

For some reason, I was attacked by a wave of pain in my stomach when the military courier came.

And so, at the command of Han Fu, the military courier yelled out the news he bore clearly to everyone at the scene

— The Yellow Turban General Du Yuan has surrounded Luoyang city with over a thousand men!

Chapter 32: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (9)

Yun Chang POV

Luoyang city is by no measure small. And it is this expansive Luoyang city that has been inexplicably blockaded in all directions by a watertight surround. The enemies are not actually very many but they have managed to stopper every intersection. Could it be that this Du Yuan man is actually a resident of Luoyang city?

But then again, such inexplicable things have been happening a lot, no?

I silently sighed in my mind, and tidied my clothing before I raised the glaive that had come as far with me as the green robe.

"Lord Guan Yu, do you really intend to help us get rid of the Yellow Turbans?" Han Fu asked as he brought my horse over with a look of gratitude.

"Yes. We are the ones borrowing passage after all, so the ones who should be opening the road through should naturally be us. Consider this repayment for your kindness."

No matter what, we owe Han Fu for letting us through without a permit. And so, we must repay that kindness. Even if I set aside my loyalty, this is something that should be done no matter what.

"If Lord Guan Yu is going to go that far, then I won't say anymore." He then gestured and Meng Tan ran up the city tower and delivered a message, "In return, I'll give you 2,000 of my troops to assist you."

"Ah, no need. The several hundred men I have are sufficient." I hurriedly turned down the offer, "If Lord Han Fu were to offer this assistance, I, Guan Yu, would end up owing you even more favours."

"But..."

"Besides, if Lord Han Fu really wants to use his own troops, then why use I, Guan Yu? Could it be that you don't trust us?"

"That's not..." Han Fu did not continue further. He looked like he still had more to say but he stopped Meng Tan in the end.

It's never a good thing to use the troops belonging to others. If anything happens, I don't know how I'm supposed to account for the deaths and injuries to troops that are not my own. In the first place, it's already difficult to do so for my own troops.

"Blade girl, if you need me to, I can bring out my troops anytime." Meng Huo came over and spoke to me in my ear softly, "The Nanman troops I brought, far outnumber the 1,000 or so

you need to face.”

“... Don’t do anything for now.” I hurriedly waved my hands as I got Meng Huo not to act. The problem we caused at Dongling Pass was already bad enough. Though time is of the essence, it’s better not to resort to extreme measures.

“Yun Chang, I’ll go with you.” Just then, Wen Yuan who had disappeared from my sight for a while now suddenly reappeared.

I wanted to turn her offer down but I saw that she had already brought her horse and glaive, and had a look on her that showed she was ready to fight.

At this sight, I swallowed my rejection and tried to think of some other reason to make her stay but could not, and merely nodded in the end.

“It’s time you set off then. The longer you all take, the more troublesome things will get.” Lu Bu who had come along with Wen Yuan said.

“Leave the lasses to me. There won’t be anything in any case.” Lu Bu yawned as she turned and went back after she finished.

“Take care not to get injured, sister Guan.” “Don’t worry, if she has any injuries. I’ll mend her back to normal.”

Gan Qing and Hua Tuo, who were behind Lu Bu, gave us some words of concern. Though they looked tired, they still did their best to encourage us.

Even if I get to them to go and rest first, they probably won’t obediently accede.

“Ah, I know.” The me at this time, could only answer as refreshingly as possible as I mounted my horse.

— Open the gates!

Hu~ It’s the first time since Xu state city that I’m fighting as the defending side of a city.

As we exited the city gates with our several hundred men, troops with Yellow Turbans wrapped around their heads stood in haphazard rows that extended into the distance, making the landscape look like a wheat field in autumn.

“A rough estimate puts them at a few thousand.” Wen Yuan sighed after she said. Using a few hundred to face a few thousand was obviously not a good idea.

“We just have to do what we always have, and make up for numbers with our martial bravery.” As she said so, Wen Yuan raised her glaive above her head and twirled it about before she slashed down at the ground to her right. As the dust settled, a deep cut into the ground could be seen.

Like we always have huh. As expected of Wen Yuan, her mentality is deserving of respect.

As I thought so, I drew in a deep breath, and then yelled out at the Yellow Turban army, “We are here as representatives of the Administrator to negotiate with you traitors! If you still know what is loyalty and honour, then surrender to the Han! We will not exact violence upon you all if you do so!”

“Ha! What a joke!” A big man at the lead raised his head at my words and scoffed before taking out his machete at his side and swinging it about as a challenge.

Is this man the commander?

“He doesn’t even know how to swing a blade properly, looks like he’s a total amateur.” Wen Yuan smiled as she stoked her horse’s neck, completely disregarding the threat from the big man.

“Then...”

Who will answer the duel first? I looked at Wen Yuan and saw that she was somewhat interested in doing so.

Die!—

Un?

Just then, the yells for slaughter entered my ears.

We still haven’t decided to answer the challenge yet the other side has already begun to charge at us.

Chapter 33: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (10)

Yun Chang POV

I don't know if it's because of construction or the strong winds that blew during the great fire, but even though there were thick forests in the distance, the immediately surroundings of Luoyang were barren.

Fighting here feels like fighting in a natural sand environment, and makes it feel even more warlike. But whatever the case, wars have rules and principles.

But now that I am faced with the Yellow Turbans who neither reply nor meet me in a duel, I'm afraid no amount of reason will work.

"Yun Chang!"

"I got it!"

Wen Yuan yelled at me, and I replied as we both charged forth and led our troops at the enemy.

As we yelled, so did the other side. Naturally, our volume was less than theirs but at least my ears were filled with the shouts from my side.

If one were to look down from atop, one would probably see several green beans get engulfed by a sea of yellow beans.

— Or perhaps, eaten up.

Ka!

When I saw the scattered enemy cavalry just several dozen paces away, I raised my Green Dragon Crescent Blade and spun it before I swung it at them, sending mud, soil and sand flying out at them.

And only then did I charge at them with full speed.

"Ha!" I swung at the first row viciously and knocked them all to the ground.

Thereafter, I swung my reins, and the red chestnut horse understood my intentions and leapt past the cavalry troops on the ground, and charged at the main body of the Yellow Turbans!

The sandy wind blew past me, and made things feel cool. I swung the reins once more and shifted my center of gravity downwards, and charged at the Yellow Turban-infested land.

Dongpa

The horse's hooves sank deeply into the ground and the surrounding people moved away, either out of fear and awe or by the shockwave.

Several people lunged forward but I swung my glaive and the current alone was enough to make them fall to the ground.

After a few seconds, the surrounding people had gathered around me but no one came forth to fight with me.

Dong!– *Dong*!–

Though the battlefield was very noisy, Wen Yuan's blows could still be heard all the way here. Looks like she's making an even bigger ruckus than I am.

It was clear that the troops here were far from elite troops. But even so, it feels like these troops are significantly stronger than the Yellow Turbans we first met. But that is to be expected after all, since they wouldn't have made it till now if they weren't.

When I saw that the time was right, I raised my glaive and yelled out to all the officers, "I am a citizen of the Great Han, I swear not to kill any of those who should surrender!" When I finished, I raised the blade and stuck it into the ground.

Even after I finished yelling, my words reverberated as echoes resounded, and the surrounding Yellow Turbans would shiver at every round.

As Sun Tzu says: A clever general avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks it when it is sluggish and inclined to return. This is the art of studying moods.

The troops at the front have good morale and must not be met head on. Now that I have made it to their heart, the main body will think that I broke through the first few defensive lines alone and will be both shocked and fearful.

As I thought about this, I swept my hair back and stroked my horse's mane calmly. Honestly, this much is all thanks to my warhorse.

Now then, I must need to deliver another threat–

Sou! All of a sudden, a sharp shadow appeared in the corner of my eye and flew at me,

"Wu!" I hurriedly dodged and made the horse step forward. It felt like something sharp just grazed my hair but I didn't feel any burning sensation so there shouldn't be any injury.

"Who dares use such hidden weapons!"

Who was that? To be able to shoot something at me from such a distance without me detecting their bloodlust.

"Great Han, Yellow Turbans, they're all just excuses to kill. We are only here to reduce our forced labour. Why else would we want to participate in bloodshed?"

The words preceded the person. After she finished, a woman who wasn't wearing the Yellow Turban military uniforms stepped forward from the crowd. She wore a hat with a veil and had her hair tied in a braided ponytail that extended to her chest. Leaving aside her expression which could be either blank or fearless, her face was truly exquisite. If it weren't for a scar that extended from below her right eye, her face would be perfect.

No matter how you looked at her, she was different from the rest. As I looked at her, I began to be interested in what kind of person she was.

"Who are you? Could you be the leader of the Yellow Turbans?"

"In short, you could say that."

"Why aren't you wearing the Yellow Turban garb? Do you want to stand out?"

"I have a blood feud with the Yellow Turbans and am unwilling to wear it because of my personal reasons."

"Oh? That's weird."

"We are in troubled times now. Nothing seems weird anymore."

... This fellow is clearly around my age, but her speech is like an elder. She's probably another plain warrior general.

"You could have taken my life just now with that hidden weapon of yours. Why are you standing before me now, aren't you afraid I might strike you down here and now?" I dug out my glaive from the ground and slashed down at the girl, parting her fringe.

She was unperturbed however, and calmly took out a red short spear from behind and got into a stance before she replied, "I go with the flow. If I should continue to live, then this won't be my burial ground."

... An interesting fellow.

"I am Guan Yu Guan Yun Chang, would you let me know your name?"

"I'm just an ordinary person, why do you need to know my name?" She sank into silence when she finished and only continued when she realised that I was still waiting for her reply, "... My name is Liao Hua, Liao Yuan Jian."

Liao Hua huh? I'll remember it.

Looks like a duel is going to happen after all.

Chapter 34: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (11)

Yun Chang POV

In a head on duel, a shorter weapon is usually at a disadvantage vs a longer weapon. The only way to match up to a longer weapon is weapon mastery and use the other side's power advantage against them.

Or totally suppress the other side with short spear techniques.

"... Un! ... Un!" Instead of yelling, Liao Hua would grunt with every attack.

I would dodge every attack only to be met with another immediately.

Ding! *Ding*!

I had no choice but to block her attacks but Liao Hua was always able to ready herself for the next attack with her lighter spear before me.

Ding! *Ding*!

I must say, this Liao Hua girl is a master of the short spear. Every move and technique doesn't seem formulaic at all, yet every attack is aimed for a vital point. I can't afford to underestimate her at all.

"Such martial prowess is wasted for a Yellow Turban commander!" I tried to bring across my respect in words between attacks in the hopes of turning her around.

"I'm not anyone important. Where ever I go, I'll only just be an ordinary person. — Un!" She replied without halting her attacks.

"In troubled times, one can't just claim to be an ordinary person and live on like that!"

"I'll give you the words I live by, those who should live won't die."

(TL: It sounds just as stupid in Chinese, if that matters.)

Ding! *Ding*! *Ding*!

She frowned, perhaps because she felt that I had begun the conversation because I was underestimating her martial prowess, and began to use even smoother and faster attacks.

This really was problematic. I didn't have the intention of underestimating her to begin with. Well then, time to end this.

Ding!

She attacked with her short spear again and I blocked it with the hilt of my blade. She then did what she had been doing before and tried to pull back and attack again, this was the chance that I had been waiting for—

“Ha!” I put all my strength behind an attack aimed at her short spear and pushed forward before she could withdraw.

“Wu!” She didn’t know how to react and could only tussle with me but she was clearly my inferior in terms of raw strength.

Neigh~~~ A shrill horse neigh pierced the air as Liao Hua and her horse fell to the ground from my forceful push.

“Uwaa! Kuh!” Liao Hua cried out when she landed on the ground and frantically tried to get up immediately but the horse had fallen onto her right leg so she was unable to get out.

Compared to her, I calmly swung my blade at the surrounding troops so they wouldn’t get involved and rode over to where Liao Hua was.

“...” When she saw that she had no way to get out, Liao Hua gave up and closed her eyes as she lay back.

“Why won’t you resist?”

“The difference in strength is too great. I have no way of resisting you.” She said as she threw her short spear away.

“So you’re surrendering then?”

“What meaning is there for a failure of a bandit to surrender? You might as well end me here and now and I can bid farewell to this life of mine.”

This fellow... Does she not have any dreams or ideals she wants to see to fruition at all?

“Then,” I said as I raised my blade and placed it at her neck, “You want me to end you?”

“...” She didn’t say anything, probably a signal of her consent.

It’s not like this is the first time I’m killing someone so one more or less doesn’t matter to me.

But...

“In that case, I won’t kill you.” I moved the cold blade away from her neck as I said so.

“...” She slowly opened her eyes and looked at the sky for a few seconds before she spoke up, “Why?”

Why huh, I feel like saying nothing, but I actually have a reason for doing so.

I surveyed my surroundings and saw that Wen Yuan has already dispersed the Yellow Turbans. Compared to my side, her shock charge was more effectual. Now that I think about it, it seems like I was bait of sorts in this battle.

But speaking of which, the actions of the Yellow Turbans are a little weird in several ways. Firstly, it is strange for them to appear here to begin with. Secondly, they went to great lengths to seal the city's exits yet when we came out of the gates, they all charged at us as though they wanted to eradicate us at all costs.

... Never mind, all's well ends well. But now that things are wrapping up, I have more time to speak with Liao Hua.

"You said that those who should live won't die right?"

"..." She looked at me silently, not sure what I was about to say.

"In that case, then you shouldn't die." I pointed the tip of the blade at her scar before I continued, "You bear great hatred within you and grievous wounds on your body but you have somehow managed to survive these troubled times. After all that you have lived through, you must surely have found a path you seek to live by. You're not just someone who just wants to live for the sake of living so how can you die here just like that? By my blade no less."

"And how do you know that I'm not someone who just wants to live for the sake of living?"

"If you were, then you wouldn't have exposed yourself to me after attacking me with the hidden weapon, no?"

"That was just..." Liao Hua had more to say but she didn't finish her words. I may not have gotten through to her but it seems like I was able to get her to reflect on herself. That's enough.

After a short while, she sighed. "General Guan, what you said is right. I do have my path, and I have yet to finish it." She spoke in a kind and warm voice, "What about General Guan's path?"

"Me?" I smiled at the sudden change of topic to myself, "Actually I'm not too clear about what my path is yet. But I think that as long as I follow big brother, I will find my own path."

"..." She sank into silence when I finished.

And in the next instant, she got out from under the horse and lunged at me.

This is—

Chapter 35: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (12)

Yun Chang POV

"What are you..." I wasn't sure how to react at her sudden movements and was about to use my blade to block when I remembered that she was unarmed and didn't follow through with blocking.

She lunged onto me and pressed down hard, making me lose my balance and fall onto the ground hard.

"Kuh!" I cried out from landing on the back of head.

"And now I have repaid the debt I owe you for not killing me." Liao Hua whispered in my ear.

"..." What does she mean?

When she saw a look of puzzlement on me and how I was getting ready to counter her, she signalled for me to look at the side with her eyes. I looked at where she was signalling and found an arrow buried in the sand

Even though there wasn't anything just now... Wait, if I think back to just now, I did seem to hear something flying through the air.

Could it be?! I hurriedly got up and looked at Luoyang's tall city walls.

Amongst the crowd was Han Fu. He had a bow in his hands and a quiver slung over the other. I can't see his expression but I can tell he is getting frantic from his actions.

"That Han Fu wants to kill me?"

"..."

Putting everything I knew and had just seen together, this was the conclusion I reached. When I looked at Liao Hua, I saw that her face was calm, and she was clearly in the know about all this.

"The Administrator never thought that he would be defeated by martial bravery and virtue."

"Un? Liao Hua?! What's going on?" I was anxious and did not understand what Liao Hua was saying.

While I was still lost, Liao Hua had gotten up and made a gesture with her hand which she raised above her head.

"Everyone! The troops on the other side have been thoroughly defeated and since we can't

get in touch with General Du Yuan, I'll take charge for now! Get in line, and return to the city!" Liao Hua yelled out and in the next instant, the Yellow Turban troops disappeared into the nearby forests.

"Eh? What's going on?"

The sea of yellow was gone, and only casualties here and there as well as my troops and a puzzles Wen Yuan were left behind.

As I looked at her from afar, it felt like she hadn't gotten enough action. The troops that had followed her charge, however, were panting profusely. Looks like the difficult journey that the troops from Xu state have been through has helped them endure such arduous battles.

I then turned to look at the city tower and find Han Fu but he wasn't there anymore.

"Was the Administrator too anxious? If he wasn't, he would have let loose a rain of arrows... Though that wouldn't have been enough to deal with you both and would have been more noticeable anyway." Liao Hua nonchalantly said some very dangerous words but at this moment her attitude isn't the problem here.

"Liao Hua, tell me what the heck is going on?!" I put power in my legs and stood up straight in one go. Because of my height, I had to look downwards to meet Liao Hua's eyes.

She looked at me and began to calmly explain herself, "These aren't actually Yellow Turbans. Our troops are actually Luoyang city's troops."

"Luoyang city's troops?"

"That's right. I am the Registrar of Luoyang and was promoted to this position 3 years ago." She closed her eyes before she continued, "In short, we're the ones who caused all this trouble."

Eh?!

"This was a scheme which Administrator Han Fu thought up after many nights and according to him, it would end in a clean and positive result with no repercussions."

"Then could it be that it was all an—"

"Administrator Han Fu doesn't usually attend to governance matters. Most of the reconstruction efforts have been directed by Meng Tan and I. Most of the details in this scheme were also worked out by Meng Tan."

"Han Fu and Meng Tan..." I was incensed at being tricked.

I really don't understand why they have to create so much trouble over a simple matter as crossing a pass. It's only a permit so why can't they just check with Meng De?

Even if you aren't going to allow us through, you don't need to do so much.

“General Guan Yu, I shouldn’t be telling you this much. As an official, I should be doing everything I can to stop you from crossing the pass.” Liao Hua turned and took out a yellow turban from her pocket and threw it on the ground with a disgusted look before she continued, “But as General Guan said, I still have a long way to go on my path. And since you gave me that chance, I will give you yours.”

When she finished, she ran over to her warhorse, made it stand and mounted it.

I was deeply moved by Liao Hua’s words. All I seek is honour, but it wasn’t something that was easily defined after all. But to put it simply, Liao Hua’s act of repaying a favour in kind should be considered honourable.

“General Guan Yu, what are you still doing here?”

Un?

Liao Hua was about to leave but she turned and spoke to me in a low voice.

“Yun Chang!!” Wen Yuan yelled out as she galloped over, “We need to get back to Luoyang now! The girls are in trouble!”

Ah! No good!

I only remembered that the girls back in the city were in danger when Wen Yuan reminded me.

Chapter 36: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (13)

Feng Xian POV

Shiku~ Haa...

I slowly took a sip of hot tea and exhaled as I sat in the room.

One really should drink more tea in winter. I don't know what type this is but the taste is pretty good. When Meng Huo and the rest go and get the leaves, I should join them as well.

"Oi! Look over here, you!"

Un? The sound came from where Meng Tan was but it wasn't Meng Tan's voice. I looked over and saw Han Fu appearing out of nowhere and panting. Meng Tan was standing in front of him and held a sharp blade in his hands.

I don't know when it happened but Meng Tan had grabbed that little lass Mi Zhen and was holding the blade at her neck.

"Sister Gan~"

"Mi Zhen!"

Gan Qing extended her hand to Mi Zhen but Han Fu grabbed on to her and pulled her up instead and took a blade which he held at Gan Qing's neck.

"Come men!!" At Han Fu's orders, several big men with choppers in their hands came walking into the room. Just by looking at them, you could tell they weren't good.

Oi oi oi... What the heck is going on now?

I was very surprised at this scene before me but understood what was going on after thinking back on everything that has happened so far.

Looks like we've fallen prey to a treacherous scheme and the Administrator wanted to eradicate us from the very beginning. I don't know about the details behind everything but I understand what's going on now.

Shiku~ I slowly took another sip of tea when I thought so.

"Oi! Do you know what kind of situation you're in now huh!"

"Sister Lu!" Gan Qing cried out as Han Fu pressed his blade further against Gan Qing's neck.

"Calm down! Don't get agitated!" I thought calmly for a moment and remembered that there were several people who were not here, "Where is Wen Yuan and Lord Guan Yu?!"

“They are... Hmph! We killed them all already!”

“Is that so...” Un, just by looking at Han Fu’s anxious look and his shaking hands, I can tell that it’s impossible that Wen Yuan and Guan Yu have been killed.

Now then, what do we do? It just so happens that Meng Huo and the rest of the Nanman have gone out to play so it seems like only I and Hua Tuo are left.

“Hu... Hu... Lord Xuan De~ It’s been a while~”

“...”

Hua Tuo’s weak breathing and mumbling could be heard. Looks like I can only count on myself.

Then—

I downed the tea that had already cooled down in 1 gulp, tucked the little furball Red Hare into my clothing and stood up.

“Y-y-you! What are you doing?!”

What a lousy question to ask, and in such a weak voice too.

“Ha.” So that I wouldn’t wake Hua Tuo up, I lightly breathed out as I swiftly extended a hand and grabbed a spear from a nearby soldier who was still in a daze.

Ah.

“Ha!!” He cried out in surprise but still managed to hold on instinctively so I grabbed on and pushed back with full force.

He gave a useless moan and flew back, knocking down several rows of troops.

Is this the level of the troops in this city? I thought, ignored the rest of the ordinary troops and pointed the spear at Han Fu.

“Kuh! You bastard, aren’t you afraid I’ll— Ka!!”

Han Fu clearly had more to say but I wasn’t listening. I grabbed onto the spear by its end and threw it out. The spear buried itself deeply into Han Fu’s hand which held the blade. While he was still reeling from the pain, I flicked away Han Fu like a rag doll and he crashed into the wall.

“Gan Qing! Jump!”

“Eh?! Oh!”

I didn’t stop there, and under my instructions, Gan Qing jumped up with all she had, and I

swept the spear under her and smashed into Meng Tan's legs.

"Guaa!" Meng Tan yelled out as he lost his balance and let go of Mi Zhen in his panic before tumbling to the ground.

In just a few seconds, I have eradicated all dangerous elements.

See, Guan Yu, Wen Yuan. I told you both nothing would happen.

"You outrageous, brazen fiends!" Meng Tan began to curse and swear at us after he was unable to get up after trying a few times.

"As Liu Bei's subordinate generals, letting you all go will only bite us and the Imperial Chancellor in the end. Moreover you all don't even have the permits, what reason can there be to let you all through?!"

"Ha! What a joke!" I looked at Meng Tan with contempt. His gaze was filled with self-righteousness and his words did seem to make sense, but were they? Looks like I need to tell him what I think.

"Firstly, Cao Cao has allowed us to return so even if this decision does cause her issues later on, it is by her will. Secondly, the rule about requiring permits was set by your lord so we have no reason to comply."

When I finished, he looked even more enraged. "You're being unreasonable!"

"In troubled times like these, does reason still exist?! And is your treacherous scheme to destroy us reasonable then?! You're ridiculous!" I couldn't help but to yell at him when I heard his naive words, "We could have ended this nicely with words, or with swords if need be. I'm different from Guan Yu and Wen Yuan. When it comes to me, that's there is to reason!"

At this, Meng Tan sank into silence, probably because he didn't want to argue any further.

But that was enough.

"Lasses, take Hua Tuo out with you. Follow Meng Huo and the other Nanman when you see them."

Gan Qing seemed to have something to say but when she saw my expression, she stopped and only asked about Mi Zhen before she dragged Hua Tuo, who was soundly asleep, out of the residence.

Next is...

I looked at the 2 men on the ground who had more or less given up and raised a broadsword I picked up off the ground.

Chapter 37: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (14)

Yun Chang POV

Haa... Haa... Haa...

When we returned back to the city, Wen Yuan went with several platoons to take control of various officials within the city while I frantically dismounted and sprinted into the residential district, my destination being Luoyang's official Administrator residence.

I prayed nothing untoward happened as I ran.

Perhaps there's a market nearby or something, but it seemed like Luoyang city was really noisy and that made me even more agitated. It was a good thing that I didn't attract too much attention as I ran so I was able to calm down my feelings on the way.

After I rounded the corner, I came to the row of dilapidated residences, and found the so-called official Administrator residence.

I was about to charge into the residence at full speed when I saw the girls and Lu Bu outside the residence, some standing, others sitting around a stone table.

Eh? This is...

"Oh? Sister Guan is back." Gan Qing was the first to see me, and began waving at me.

I only felt easy once more when I was able to see clearly that everyone was well and unharmed.

"Ah, I'm back." I smiled as I replied seeing the girls all fine, "Are you all alright?"

"Un, thanks to sister Lu." Gan Qing smiled as she nodded, but there was still some sign of tension on her face. Or perhaps she got a scare.

I then looked at Lu Bu, and saw that she was sitting somewhere away from the rest, and was quietly and calmly drinking tea. I thought for a moment and decided that it would be better to ask her directly what happened.

"Lord Lu Bu, we fell for Han Fu's scheme. The Yellow Turbans outside were all actually city troops. Han Fu probably wanted to deal with us on both sides." I said as I looked at Lu Bu, who remained calm as she listened to me.

"Un, I know. The Administrator and his trusted general did send some assailants just now." Lu Bu said as she raised her tea cup and pointed at Gan Qing, "He even tried to hold her hostage."

"Han Fu, that bastard!"

Pa! I slapped the table in rage. How I wished the table was Han Fu and Meng Tan instead.

“Don’t worry, Lord Guan Yu. I’ve settled everything and scared away the troops as well.”

“Un, it does seem like the case to me. Looks like I really don’t need to worry when there’s Lord Lu Bu around as expected.” As I said so, I looked about, “Then, where is Han Fu and Meng Tan? Did Lord Lu Bu tie them up and leave them in the residence?”

“... Tie?” Lord Lu Bu shot back with a question and a puzzled look.

I didn’t really understand why she was asking me that, but just then, I realised that there were 2 fresh bloodstains on Lu Bu’s armour.

Could it be...

I didn’t bother saying too much, and turned toward the residence and opened the door by a crack. When I saw what happened inside, I frowned and slowly shut the door before turning to Lu Bu

“Lord Lu Bu, what have you done!” I asked Lu Bu anxiously, and kept my voice as low as possible. “What good is Han Fu and Meng Tan’s deaths to us?”

“What’s the point of keeping the 2 of them? They’re just evil, treacherous men who could not possibly aid us in any way. Do you think they will let us pass?”

“Aiya! But that doesn’t mean we need to kill...”

“If I don’t kill them, then how could I save the 2 lasses so quickly? How could I have driven off the incoming troops?” Lu Bu was irritated when she looked at my dismayed expression.

“Then...”

“Even if it’s me, a rescue operation is difficult especially since that’s not my specialty to begin with. If they had called for more troops all of a sudden or if I had neglected the lasses due to exhaustion and either of us got injured, who would be responsible?” Lu Bu raised her volume with each sentence. Her tone was still calm and what she said did indeed make sense.

“Sister Guan.” Just then, Gan Qing came over, and looked at me with a difficult expression, “Please don’t blame sister Lu for this.”

“That’s right that’s right, sister Lu was so cool just now!”

“Ha~~~ So tired...”

Looking at the 2 girls, I didn’t have the heart to say anymore, and calmed myself down.

“... I’m not really blaming her.” I wanted to say something just now, but I’ve forgotten what it was already.

“Hai, I understand. This could have been avoided and I did indeed say too much.”

“No...”

Lu Bu seems to have realised that she was speaking loudly. But what Lu Bu said was right. If it were me, I would probably have chosen to kill those dishonourable people if I had to.

“Eh? Why is everyone outside?” Just then, Meng Huo and his band returned. They all had small and big bags of stuff in their hands and were puzzled when they saw us standing and sitting outside.

“Un, stuff happened.” I shook my head tiredly.

“Something happened huh...” Meng Huo smiled as he looked at me. It was difficult to look at that smile but he didn’t ask any further. He only said, “Is that so? Tell me later.” He then walked over to the side and spoke with the rest of his band.

It’s not like I can’t tell them what happened. It’s just a bit ironic how I told them not to act yet things happened like this anyway.

Un, what a joke.

“Yun Chang, my lord~~” Just then, Wen Yuan came rushing over and waved with an excited look.

Just as I was about to ask Wen Yuan what happened, she spoke up, “Luoyang city is ours!”

Chapter 38: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (15)

Yun Chang POV

Luoyang city was still very big. Though it was burned down once, and the old palaces were also burned down, once people started gathering again, the city slowly regained its old vitality and became a vibrant city once more.

Instead of looking from within the city, when one looks down from the city towers, one would find that the outer parts of the city are still fairly deserted. The more one went toward the city center, the more prosperous new Luoyang city was. And in its heart, it was virtually back to the old Luoyang city.

"Oh~ Looking from up here is more beautiful."

"Is this the original village of the Central Plains?"

"My lady, they call it a capital city here." "Luoyang city was the capital city of the Eastern Han. Look at the rubble over there, it was formerly where the palace stood." "I heard that traitorous retainers from Western Liang attacked the capital and when things got bad, the traitors burned down the place."

Meng Huo and his band were standing in the city tower. Looks like they're very interested in the Central Plains.

"Actually, it's my first time to Luoyang too~"

"Really?! Sister Gan hasn't been to Luoyang before too?"

"I could have continued with the flow of battle and taken Luoyang a while back but I failed unfortunately. Later on when I came with Xuan De here, all I saw was the wreckage."

Though Gan Qing and Mi Zhen were from the Central Plains, they hadn't been here before. On the other hand, what Huo Tuo just said is pretty interesting. If the Yellow Turbans had been able to occupy Luoyang then, history would probably be very different.

My feelings were able to settle as I looked at everyone having fun taking in the scenery.

In such troubled times, the people of Luoyang have not abandoned hope to live. Or rather, the people here are living life to the fullest. It's almost as if they are living in different times than we are.

"Hai~ It's the heart of the Great Han after all. This is the sort of place it should be." I sighed as I thought back to when I was a child and the sights I saw when my father brought me here.

Things have changed. These words really resonate with me.

"The first time I came was with my foster father. I had wanted to tour the streets then but gave up." Lu Bu said as she played with Red Hare's little head beside me with a calm face.

"Hai~"

"Is there a problem?"

"No, I just never thought that Lord Lu Bu would want to tour the streets."

"I actually suffer quite the shock from hearing you say this of me, though I do indeed give people that impression."

I looked at Lu Bu's unchanging face, and couldn't see any sign that she was shocked... Un, probably in her heart I guess.

Then, I thought of what just happened. Lu Bu was quite angry just now, which was rare. Or perhaps the indefinite end to this long and arduous journey has gotten on her nerves.

But let's leave that aside first.

"Wen Yuan."

"Un?" Wen Yuan replied me casually as she held onto the railings with her hands and looked out below while she stuck her whole body out dangerously.

"Could you tell me again what you said before?" I was still a little doubtful at what Wen Yuan just said.

"No need for her to say it. I'll do it." Just then a cold voice came from behind me. I turned and saw Liao Hua in an official uniform standing straight. In her hands, she held a box.

"To put it simply, Han Fu was only recently appointed as the Administrator and transferred here. He isn't capable, is arrogant, enjoys luxuries, and doesn't enjoy the support of the people. Meng Tan is a capable general and administrative official but he is absolutely loyal to Han Fu. The both of them are treacherous and greedy, and Luoyang city will undoubtedly face issues before long." When Liao Hua finished explaining calmly, she looked down at the city with a pensive expression.

"Now the both of them are dead, and the harm to the city has been purged. It should now be left to be managed by outstanding talents that have appeared."

"By outstanding talents... Do you mean us?"

"I've only just gotten to know all of you so I'm unable to conclude that." She paused, and then continued, "But the ones who slew Han Fu were undeniably you lot, and so the support of the people, and this official seal is yours for the taking." When she finished, she opened the box she held, and inside was the seal of the Administrator of Luoyang city.

I really didn't think that Han Fu and Meng Tan were this sort of people. Perhaps Lu Bu was

right to kill them after all. And now, everyone was looking at me. No one replied to Liao Hua, not even Lu Bu. I looked at Lu Bu, and I wasn't sure if she noticed my gaze, but she wasn't looking at me.

"..." I looked at the seal, and without thinking any further, closed the box as I said, "I understand your kind intentions but we still have to get to Runan so we cannot accept it."

"Speaking of which, wouldn't it be for the best for Liao Hua to stay and take on the role of Administrator? You do enjoy the support of the people, and you can let us cross the pass as well." Just then, Wen Yuan came forward and said her piece. What she said was indeed a good idea.

"My abilities are lacking and I am unable to take on such a significant responsibility. And if you all are going to leave, then I have no reason to stay."

Eh? What did she say at the end?

"No reason to stay? Why is that?"

"When General Guan asked me before what my path was, I was able to see very clearly what the path I should take looks like." Liao Hua calmly set the seal down on a brick and calmly bowed and saluted.

"My path is to be witness to the events that will take place in these troubles times." She got up as she said so, and looked at me with resolute eyes, "For this, I am unwilling to be a petty official in a city and wish to experience much more things in many more places. If you all are to leave, I will follow."

(TL: In historical, Liao Hua served as Guan Yu's registrar. In the original Liao Hua was a Yellow Turban commander who saved Lady Gan and Lady Mi during this journey, and thus gained the trust of Guan Yu and served him.)

Chapter 39: Don't tell me this is riding as 3 for thousands of miles (16)

Yun Chang POV

After a day and half of rest and recovery, we left Luoyang city at first light on the 3rd day. After the battle at Luoyang, the several hundred men we had suffered a fair number of casualties and were now just barely enough to guard our convoy.

And Meng Huo and the Nanman did not follow us for now. They were fascinated by the sights in Luoyang and were not too concerned with getting across the river as quickly as possible.

"Blade girl, we'll be staying here for a few days more." Meng Huo said to me as he sent us out, "You Central Plain-ers have too much on your mind and if you want to keep advancing, you have to set some things down."

His words were uncharacteristic of him, but perhaps it's because they seem uncharacteristic that those words have more weight.

"Un, I understand." I replied as I saluted him in thanks.

"We'll meet again at the river crossing." They said as they sent us off, staying to watch us outside Luoyang city until we were out of sight.

Are the people of Nanman all this warm?

"General Guan, do you really not want to summon some of Luoyang's guards?" Just as I was preoccupied random thoughts, Liao Hua parted the veil on her hat and spoke to me with an indifferent expression. It didn't look cold but I couldn't feel any warmth from it either.

"No. Now that you have left Luoyang as well, there might be some unrest in Luoyang so the city needs all the guards it can get."

On the other hand, after that battle, I experienced firsthand how weak the soldiers of Luoyang city were. Of course, I won't mention this as a reason.

As for Liao Hua, she still followed even after numerous attempts to turn her down.

She left the Administrator seal in the Administrator residence and wrote 2 letters, 1 for her resignation and another, a recommendation for Administrator. And now she was just an ordinary person with no official position.

And so, Meng Huo and the Nanman have left us temporarily while we have gained an old-fashioned girl, Liao Hua.

But really, why did Liao Hua choose to come with us all of a sudden? We only knew each other for less than an hour and she'd decided to hand over Luoyang to us, and thereafter, to

leave with us.

It's a little too absurd.

I looked ahead and saw Wen Yuan and Lu Bu discussing something over the map. Feeling bored, I decided to ask the question that had been bothering me. "Umm Liao Hua."

"What is it, General Guan?" She replied in a low voice as usual as she sat on the horse with her back fully straight, in a position that would not have seemed out of place in a textbook.

Looking at Liao Hua who was like this, I couldn't help but feel serious as well.

"I wanted to ask, where are you planning to go from here on?"

"Where ever works, as long as I'm with you all."

"Hai~ Alright then," At her words, I had no choice but to cut to the chase and ask what was bothering me, "If you just want to be witness to history, why do you have to follow us then?"

"... General Guan wants the truth from me?"

"Un, I really don't understand why you must follow us."

"It's not like I can't talk about it," She paused and turned to look at me for the first time with an honest gleam in her eyes, "I can't really put my finger to it, but I feel that everyone's paths are very murky."

"Eh?"

Our paths are murky?

I don't know about Lu Bu but for me, I follow the path of loyalty and honour, and I have been doing so.

When she saw my puzzled look, Liao Hua did not seem perturbed and continued explaining, "Now that we've established Han Fu and Meng Tan as treacherous villains, if it weren't General Lu Bu but General Guan back in Luoyang city then, what would you have done?"

"If it were me, I would definitely have made the same choices as Lord Lu Bu did then."

That's right. As one who holds loyalty and honour above all, eradicating evil is a duty I adhere to.

Liao Hua was pleased at my answer and nodded, "Then let me give you an example. Let's say that Han Fu and Meng Tan were truly virtuous and upright men. Would you still kill them under those circumstances?"

"Then... I'll save the girls without killing them then."

I would probably be able to achieve this. Lu Bu and Wen Yuan could probably do so as well.

“Then, what if the ones you faced weren’t the weak Han Fu and Meng Tan but yourself?”

“You mean someone who is as strong as me and is also a virtuous individual?”

“Un, you can say that.”

“No, that’s impossible.” I shook my head as I said so, “If I were the Administrator, I would not take the weak and unarmed as hostages.”

“But, had General Guan ever thought that—” Liao Hua paused and waited for all my attention to be on her before she continued, “The other side has done so in adherence to his or her own treasured virtues, and is following his or her own path in doing so?”

Adherence to own virtues... Did they have their own path as well?

“Impossible, what sort of virtues would condone taking the weak as hostages?”

“General Guan, do you know of the importance of a permit when crossing the pass for a gatekeeper general?” Liao Hua continued when she saw my contempt, “If the gatekeeper general lets someone of grave importance cross the pass without a permit, they will be executed.”

“Eh?”

There... Was such a thing?

“Whether it’s Yu Jin of Dongling Pass or Han Fu of Luoyang city; to them, having a permit to cross their pass is their ‘path’ to follow. And so, what you think General Guan and your companions are to them?”

Dishonourable people... Huh?

I slowly recited the answer in my heart.

As Liao Hua said, our request was unreasonable to the gatekeeper generals.

All this while, I’ve always believed that the path I walked was the right one, and all those who were in my way were wrong. But in reality, they were just trying to follow their own path, and being loyal to the ones they should be loyal to.

Then if my path wasn’t wrong, and neither was theirs, then... What is virtuous? What is not virtuous?

“...”

When she saw me sink into thought, Liao Hua slowly blinked and began to speak again, “The path of virtue is one that is contradictory to begin with. Even if you can judge yourself, you

cannot judge others. And this is the path that General Guan has chosen. I don't know what path the other 2 generals have chosen but I feel that they should be lost as well."

Liao Hua wasn't very old but she could see through many things. Perhaps it's a gift, or perhaps she acquired it.

But I must say, her words are starting to raise a lot of questions inside me.

"Then could it be that the path of virtue is one that leads to nowhere?"

"No," Liao Hua replied and smiled at me for the first time when she heard my muttering, "I feel that General Guan can find a way to resolve this conundrum, and that is why I have chosen to follow General Guan."

"Eh?"

I can resolve it?

"General Guan is decisive, when you meet with trouble, you do not get anxious, and you do not act without thinking things through. As a virtuous and upright individual, you are already excellent. Perhaps you may not have detected it yet but you have already unknowingly found a way to resolve the contradiction."

She seemed to have said all she wanted to say, and put her veil back down, "My oath is to be witness to history, and the path of others. And I am willing to follow General Guan on your journey down the path of virtue."

Liao Hua was finished, but I wasn't.

Xuan De, is my path really correct?

VOLUME 5 CHAPTER 40: DON'T TELL ME THIS IS RIDING AS 3 FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES
(17)

At the very moment when Guan Yu and the rest set off from Luoyang, other parties began to move at Sishui Pass several dozen miles away.

“Now that the frontlines are getting tight, I suggest that we send another wave of the garrison here to support the frontlines as our position here at Sishui Pass is not too important.”

The gatekeeper of Sishui Pass— Bian Xi, was currently kneeling in the meeting room in the city tower and discussing military deployments with several officials. At this time, the Battle of Guandu had not progressed to its climax and both sides were still in a standoff.

And Bian Xi knew that the frontline badly needed troops now that they were in a battle of attrition.

“Lord Bian Xi! Lord Bian Xi!”

Just as they had settled the deployments, a frantic yell could be heard from the outside. Bian Xi stopped speaking and raised her head to look at the entrance.

“Lord Bian Xi!”

A man with messy clothing came running in as the sound got clearer. He was old, and his beard had begun to turn white. He seemed tired and looked listless.

Bian Xi looked at the person and saw that it was the Administrator of Xingyang, Wang Zhi.

“Un? Why has Lord Wang Zhi come at this time? If I remember correctly, this isn't the time

we set for a meeting...”

“Now isn’t the time for that!” Wang Zhi interrupted Bian Xi and rushed into the room, “My son-in-law has been killed!”

“Un? Your son-in-law?” Bian Xi didn’t understand immediately and only did so after a moment, “Lord Han Fu is it? Did something happen in Luoyang?”

“Aiya! Lord Bian Xi, something very dangerous did happen!”

Yun Chang POV

It’s been a few days since we’ve hit the road after leaving Luoyang city. Looking back and front, apart from the dirt road looking like how I remember it, there’s not much to say.

Mountains, forests, rivers. Even with such pristine nature about me, I don’t have the desire to admire its beauty.

The reason why I was troubled lay in my heart.

The words which Liao Hua told me several days ago have made me think deeply all this while. And I have begun to doubt if the path I have always taken is correct.

Peoples’ paths clash after all, so will my path of virtue inevitable trample those of others?

And it is from questions like these that doubts about my path arise from.

I don’t know what I should do when I reach the next pass. Should I wait even if I can’t

convince the gatekeeper general?

But waiting feels unreliable as who knows if they really would check or if they would let us cross after they confirm we have a permit?

But... Should I trust them...

No good, the more I think, the worse it gets.

But if we keep getting through with brute force, I'm afraid I'll stray farther and farther from my path of virtue.

I didn't dare to verbalise what I thought in my heart. If it really was like what Liao Hua said, then perhaps I shouldn't voice out my doubts. Sometimes, it's better to trouble only oneself with one's own doubts.

As I looked at Wen Yuan and Lu Bu who were fiddling around with the map as usual, I nodded in my heart.

"What is General Guan thinking about?"

Eh? I turned and saw that Liao Hua had come beside me all of a sudden.

"Ah, no. I'm just concerned because General Guan has been frowning a lot these last few days."

I only noticed this when I heard her say this and hurriedly loosened up my creased eyebrows.

“Just thinking about some stuff, I guess.” I smiled and changed the topic, “Speaking of which, what’s the next pass? Hulao Pass?”

“Hulao Pass? Wasn’t that the old name?” Liao Hua tilted her head and then clapped all of sudden in realisation, “Oh! Does General Guan know about the merger of Hulao Pass and Sishui Pass?”

Ah! That’s right, there was such a thing.

The things that happened at Sishui Pass seem like so long ago. I still remember the competition to catch Red Hare with Lu Bu and the rest. I lost in the end, but it’s all good.

Un... I wonder what happened to the hot spring outside Sishui Pass.

(TL: Refer to V1 extra story.)

My memories started playing before me when I thought of Sishui Pass.

Thinking back, time has passed by really quick. It’s almost a year now since leaving Zhuo commandery.

We passed through Sishui Pass from the outside the last time, but now we’re exiting through Sishui Pass.

Fate has a funny way of playing out huh.

“Yun Chang, we’re here!” Just as I was swirling in melancholy, Wen Yuan who was at the head of our convoy yelled out cheerfully at me.

My heart trembled when I heard her and an unexplainable dread filled my heart which forced my hands to pull on the reins and stop the horse.

I suppressed it somehow and galloped up to Lu Bu and Wen Yuan with Liao Hua following behind me.

Sishui Pass was now right before us. I looked up and sure enough, the words 汜水关 were there as expected.

Now then, time to announce ourselves.

“...”

“Un? Yun Chang?”

“Ah, un.” What is wrong with me, why did I go into a daze...

I shook my head and took a deep breath—

“Oi! Soldiers at the tower! Please notify the Administrator to allow us to cross the pass!!”

Dong! *Giyahhhh*...

Just when I finished, the gates opened as though they were prepared for us.

Please don't be like the last time.

I silently prayed in my heart.

VOLUME 5 CHAPTER 41: DON'T TELL ME THIS IS RIDING AS 3 FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES
(18)

Yun Chang POV

As the gates opened, a scholarly-looking woman walked out. She didn't wear armour, nor did she ride a horse, nor were there troops behind her. The feeling one got from her was that of an ordinary citizen.

"Bian Xi has been waiting for everyone for a long time now!" She spoke up first and saluted when she was about 10 paces away from us, "I am Bian Xi, the humble gatekeeper general of Sishui Pass." She bowed when she finished.

"Ah, ah!" At this, I hurriedly saluted and bowed in return. "Umm, we're..."

"Ah, I know who you all are already." Bian Xi respectfully interrupted before I could finish and pointed at the open gates, "Come in first. Everything else can wait till we're in the city."

I was stunned and turned to look at Wen Yuan on my left. Wen Yuan was also puzzled but she recovered soon enough.

"We'll be troubling you then." Wen Yuan said and began to slowly head inside the city.

"..." Lu Bu, who was on my right, didn't say anything and also entered the city while she kept her eyes on Bian Xi.

"General Guan, let's lead the carriage in." Liao Hua reminded. I gripped the Green Dragon Crescent Blade in my hand and waved lightly behind me, before leading the rest of the convoy into the city.

Just as Liao Hua was about to catch up to me, Bian Xi suddenly straightened up and spoke to Liao Hua, "If I'm not wrong, you must be Liao Hua, the Registrar of Luoyang, right?"

Liao Hua stopped her horse, "Un, I used to be. But I've resigned."

Liao Hua caught up to me when she finished. I'd thought that Bian Xi would continue with further questions but she didn't say anything and followed us.

This Bian Xi person, what is the meaning of all this... Compared to Han Fu, I really can't read her at all.

After we entered the pass and set down our belongings, we followed Bian Xi to the official residence in the pass.

The official residence was the same as always, and didn't differ much from when we stayed here during the campaign on Dong Zhuo. The only thing that changed was that the people, and troops, seemed to be much less on the way in here.

"Please have a seat, everyone. We are currently experiencing some tough times. This small pass is different from Luoyang and Xingyang, our resources are scarce so please forgive my lacking reception."

"No, we are uninvited guests to begin with so we are not in a position to make any demands." I said as I gestured to Bian Xi. She nodded and entered the room with us,

I and Lu Bu sat at the head of both right and left, while Liao Hua, Wen Yuan, Hua Tuo, Gan Qing, and Mi Zhen followed behind and filled up the seats behind us.

"I've heard about you all already, whether it's about Dongling Pass or Luoyang." Bian Xi spoke up, as though she couldn't hold it in anymore, just as our butts touched the cushions.

Bian Xi's straightforwardness shocked me. It was all the more surprising that she said so with a calm expression on her.

"If you know all that, then why did you invite us into the city?" Lu Bu ignored the signal I tried to send her and cut straight to the chase, "Could you be thinking of dealing with us like how Han Fu did?"

As she finished, Lu Bu swiftly raised her halberd while Wen Yuan and Liao Hua became alert as well.

"..." At this show of might, Bian Xi did not reply immediately. Instead, she raised her cup of tea and took a sip before she replied, "We are facing an extraordinarily tough situation here as most of the troops and resources have been sent to the frontlines who badly need what they can get. All that I have left are about 500 frail and older troops."

"..." In that case, what is it that you are planning to do? I silently pondered and didn't verbalise my doubts. Perhaps I wasn't too keen on learning the answer.

In any case, the atmosphere in the residence now was extremely awkward. Whether it was me or the others, everyone had their suspicions. Only Hua Tuo wasn't on guard, and Gan Qing was busy tending to Mi Zhen, who didn't know what was going on and was falling asleep from sitting down.

"Since you're being rather friendly with us, can we assume you intend to allow us to cross the pass?" Finally, Liao Hua asked the question that was on our minds.

"You all have neither a personal letter from the Imperial Chancellor nor a permit so there is no way you can cross. This is something that cannot be waved away." Bian Xi's reply was much like the ones before, and she delivered it in a more resolute voice than the rest.

"Oi, stop..."

“Lord Lu Bu!” Seeing that Lu Bu was about to get enraged, I hurriedly stopped her. She seemed to understand where I was coming from and sat down thereafter.

We’ve made mistakes at Dongling Pass and at Luoyang. I really don’t want to make a 3rd mistake. I thought, and wrangled inside my mind for a while before I said the words I should have said from the very beginning, “Then if we should wait here, how soon can we acquire the permit?”

“Yun...” Wen Yuan wanted to interrupt me, but I placed my hand on her shoulder and lightly shook my head. She sighed, and decided to wait for Bian Xi’s reply.

“As soon as 3 days, as long as 10.”

10 days!

“You bastard...” Lu Bu stood up with a slight frown on her usually unperturbed face. It was clear that she was very angry from this alone.

“Speaking objectively, you lot have forcefully broken through 2 passes and this has resulted in death and injury of key officials. There needs to be a thorough investigation by the relevant Imperial Court personnel who will have to consider the consequences before issuing you lot a permit.” Bian Xi spoke up, her expression unchanged despite facing an enraged Lu Bu.

However, the words she said next were even more disconcerting, “But even if you lot do get a permit. You’re all a bane to the Imperial Chancellor and I’m afraid I can’t let you all cross the pass. This is my personal view.”

When she finished, silence filled the room. Reflected in my eyes was Bian Xi drinking tea as she sat there and the horrific visage of a frowning Lu Bu.

As for me, I too was considering if I should resort to force.

Yun Chang POV

Because of the myriad battles fought around Sishui Pass, its immediate surroundings were barren, and so within a short span of time, sand, soil and dust covered the residence.

All of us were sitting as we were before. Wen Yuan's face was much less relaxed before and Liao Hua had closed her eyes. Only Lu Bu would shoot me glances from time to time to ask if we ought to start using more forceful measures.

At these glances, I only lightly shook my head.

I turned to look at Bian Xi, and saw that her weak and soft body was still sitting there. In these 15 minutes or so, she had been attending to some documents, and would sip some tea as she did so.

"I beseech the gatekeeper general to be magnanimous and let us cross the pass." I thought for a moment, but couldn't think of any good reasons to persuade her and repeated the words I'd used before, "The Imperial Chancellor has genuinely let us leave. We have also achieved much for the Imperial Chancellor back when we were at her service so we deserve passage."

I was practically begging her by now, as I really did not want to resort to force. I feel like if I always have to resort to force, my path will become a savage and wrong one.

Bian Xi looked at me, and it seemed like she knew what I was thinking about, and her calm face melted away. She frowned and slowly sighed, "I know that you all won't stop advancing because of my words. I did all this just to carry out what I should do to follow my path."

Hei! Bian Xi leapt out from behind the table and stood in front of the entrance with her

arms spread when she finished.

“You may cross the pass by killing me. But I’m just fulfilling my duties so you will not be able to justify your acts in this pass.”

“...” My grip tightened as my heart shook from Bian Xi’s look that was as though she had made her resolve for whatever might come her way.

Under these circumstances, doesn’t it look like a virtuous individual standing up to a bunch of lawless, evil miscreants? What exactly is my virtuous path supposed be in such a situation?!

Can I really kill her, for my ideals, just because our paths clash?

“Alright. Since you’ve said so, then we will answer.” Just then, Wen Yuan smiled as she said so and relaxedly got up from the table before walking over to Bian Xi with her glaive in hand.

“But we do not kill those who do not resist. If you truly wish to resist us, then draw your weapons and face us in battle.”

“Wen, Wen Yuan.”

“... I understand.” Bian Xi’s voice shook as she slowly drew her sabre hanging by her waist with her left hand and pointed it at us.

“Come out!” Bian Xi commanded with her weak and soft voice, and several dozen axemen came out from various parts of the residence, “Will this do?”

Though I called them axemen, it was clear that their capabilities were lacking. Apart from

the front few who were able to emit some bloodlust, the men and women behind were thin and frail.

Perhaps this was all the 'courtesy' that Sishui Pass could muster.

"Un, I understand."

Wen Yuan and Lu Bu then got into their stances, ready to charge out anytime. Opposite them, Liao Hua caught my eye and took her short spear as she stood in front of the girls.

"Since Lord Bian Xi won't let us through, then we have no choice." I sighed at the situation before me as I drew my glaive.

"I understand. We're all just following our own paths." Bian Xi smiled, as though she was indifferent at the impending violence.

— Ha!

The first to act was Lu Bu. She smashed her halberd down onto Bian Xi's head like a hurricane while Wen Yuan followed beside her.

Ding! Bian Xi swung her sword and blocked it, but was deflected and she had no choice but to swiftly jump backwards out of the room.

As for me, I was passive as I held my glaive while the bulk of the axemen surrounding us charged at me. Because of what happened before, I wasn't very enthusiastic about fighting them, and did not wish to kill them wantonly either,

"Ya!" I swung out with my hilt, with the intent of knocking them away and breaking through

the surround.

But the longer the fight went on, the more passive I got, and I was unable to advance. I felt like my heart stood still.

In a few minutes, Bian Xi would probably meet her end at Wen Yuan or Lu Bu's blade. As I thought so, I didn't know what I felt or thought about such a result. All I knew was that I felt awful inside, and relieved that I didn't have to be the one to kill Bian Xi.

"Ah!" A tender voice cried out from outside, and I saw Bian Xi's body hurtling back into the room from outside and landing on the floor.

She was probably blown back from blocking Lu Bu's attack head on.

Bian Xi's face was covered in dust, and she looked terribly battered. But even so, she still tried to stand. In my heart, I began to feel that this person's path was remarkably bright.

"Yaa!!" Just then, Wen Yuan blew away the surrounding axemen and lunged forward to the defenseless Bian Xi's back.

And then, Wen Yuan's blade descended

VOLUME 5 CHAPTER 43: DON'T TELL ME THIS IS RIDING AS 3 FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES
(20)

Yun Chang POV

It was now noon, the sun peeked out from the grey clouds and lit up the residence.

At the entrance stood 2 people, with another laying on the floor. The sharp blade glimmered under the radiance of the sun.

When Bian Xi fell, the axemen all retreated in various directions as though this had been agreed upon.

“Wen Yuan...” I called out weakly to Wen Yuan who stood at the entrance with her glaive, and was at a loss as to what I ought to say.

My path...

“Yun Chang, let’s get out of here quick while Bian Xi is knocked out!”

Eh?

Wen Yuan flew into the room and picked up Hua Tuo as she said so while Liao Hua and Lu Bu carried Gan Qing and Mi Zhen respectively.

Eh??

“General Guan, don’t just stand there.” Liao Hua turned and looked at me with a calm expression, “We won’t be able to re-supply but we still have enough provisions for the time

being so let's go."

Ah! I grabbed my glaive and quickly made for the entrance.

As I left, I stepped across Bian Xi's body and saw that she had her eyes closed in a peaceful expression. Her cheeks were also still a healthy shade.

Wen Yuan didn't cut down Bian Xi. She only knocked her out with her hilt.

Hu. I exhaled and ran up to the rest who were ahead.

I thought there might be more hindrances but we didn't encounter much resistance from assembling our convoy to exiting the city.

Only after we'd made it a few miles out away from the city did I rest easy.

"Yun Chang."

"Eh?!" I got a shock when Wen Yuan suddenly clapped my shoulder.

"I feel like you're a little weird these few days."

"Un? Am I? A, am I?" I shook my head as I said so but my expression probably betrayed how I really felt.

"Yun Chang... I don't know what happened, but I feel like you've been pretty distracted after the incident in Luoyang."

Was it that obvious? I got a shock inside but I quickly accepted the reality before me. Since Wen Yuan asked me outright, I can only tell her the whole truth.

I wavered between feeling that I should and shouldn't share how I felt and was somehow able to more or less deliver the critical parts of what had been troubling me these few days in dribs and drabs.

"Oh, so that's what it's all about huh." Wen Yuan seemed relaxed as always, and didn't seem to be perturbed when I finished.

"I'm starting to feel that my definition of good and evil might not be right. Leaving aside Yu Jin, I feel that Bian Xi and Han Fu were not wrong in doing what they did, and that the ones in the wrong were us who broke through the passes."

That's right. It is unjust for us to do so.

"But with Yu Jin, wasn't it because of Meng Huo who unilaterally attacked? We're not responsible for that right?"

"No, if I had been more assertive then, we might have been able to wait there for a permit and it would have ended well."

"But Yun Chang, how would you have known then that the gatekeeper general wasn't someone like Han Fu?"

"..." I sank into silence, because I didn't have a reply. I don't how I ought to view people, and my ideals and couldn't resolve this dilemma.

Wen Yuan laughed when she saw how I looked, "Hahaha! Yun Chang, you really are..." She

shook her head and narrowed her eyes as she continued, “We aren’t saints so how could we walk a path that doesn’t have conflict in it?”

“...” I continued to remain silent. I understood what she meant but didn’t know how to deal with that.

“When the ideals we stand for clash with those of others, I feel that we should protect our ideals with all of our strength.”

“But what if the ideals we hold dear are wrong?”

“There is no right or wrong when it comes to one’s own ideals,” Wen Yuan replied as she stroked the horse’s mane, her expression still bright as before, “What we must do is to be steadfast to our ideals and respect the ideals of others.”

“Respect...” Is confronting the ideals of others with all your strength respect for them?

Is that why Bian Xi resisted us, meagre as she was? Was it the same with Yu Jin? Even if they were treacherous, was it the same with Han Fu and Meng Tan as well?

“Yun Chang, don’t think too much. We just need to continue following our path. Doubts may arise from time to time but all we can do is to follow through with what we believe in the best we can, and leave the rest to fate.” She raised her reins when she saw that I had begun to perk up and continued, “Yun Chang, do you still remember what you told me about your ideals when we first met?”

Wen Yuan galloped off to the front when she finished.

The ideals I spoke about...

— I seek to follow a path where I can one day face everything and everyone with a righteous heart.

One day... Huh. I smiled as I thought back to what I said.

“General Guan need not be too hasty. Life is a long and windy journey. You will find your answer eventually.” Just then, Liao Hua, the one who believed I could reach an answer, rode up to me.

“It’s fine even if you don’t ever find an answer. There’s no point in agonising over it throughout your life after all.” Lu Bu spoke up to me on the other side, “For now, Lord Guan Yu, can you tell Wen Yuan to stop for a bit... The rest of our convoy can’t keep up...”

“Ah, un.” I hurriedly acknowledged her as I swung my reins and rode up to Wen Yuan.

That’s right, why do I have to be so anxious about finding an answer now?

All I have to focus on now is to keep advancing!

VOLUME 5 CHAPTER 44: DON'T TELL ME THIS IS RIDING AS 3 FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES
(21)

Yun Chang POV

I stuck my face into the icy spring water lake and was instantly assaulted by a bone-chilling cold that permeated my body and made me shiver.

There was snowfall for a few days and after it stopped, the weather became colder and colder. But it is at these times that I am more willing to take in my surroundings. I engraved the cold like the chill I got just now into my heart so that I can recall this sensation and remain cool inside when summer returns.

At this time, we have stopped for rest and are currently enjoying the beautiful winter scenery.

“Oh~~~”

“Don’t roll about little sister! You’ll catch a cold!”

Mi Zhen rolled about on the snowy ground after she got down from the carriage with a look of sheer joy on her face. Gan Qing, on the other hand, was picking up the thick clothing Mi Zhen took off and chasing after her.

Playing around is fine but it wouldn’t be fun anymore if she were to get sick.

“Hua Tuo, go and give Gan Qing a hand...”

“Oh~~~~”

I turned to speak to Hua Tuo, in the hopes that she could help, but this girl who was about the same age as me was currently rolling about on the ground like a kid as well.

Never mind, they've been cooped up in the carriage all this while after all.

Speaking of which, would there be game to hunt in the surrounding forests at this time of the year? The last time we had meat was back in Xuchang.

"Lord Lu Bu, Wen Yuan, let's go hu..."

"Hua... Hu..."

"... Wen Yuan, stop snoring!"

I turned to the other side and found Lu Bu and Wen Yuan lying down on the snow. Wen Yuan was already fast asleep and soundly snoring while Lu Bu was frowning and had an irritated look, probably because she couldn't sleep with the snoring beside her.

We've been taking turns to keep watch all this while, and we haven't enough to eat so it's no wonder they are fatigued.

But I really didn't think that everyone would be so indolent.

Haa~~ I yawned as I thought so.

"General Guan, I have some matters regarding the troops that I wish to consult you on."

At this time, the only one who was still energetic was Liao Hua, who did not was still

recording every last detail about our journey.

“You really are hardworking huh...”

“I was a Registrar after all.” She flicked her hair back as she said so as a matter of factly with a blank expression. She then came up closer to me with the scroll as she continued, “About the recruitment of troops... Ah!”

A sudden flying missile made Liao Hua cry out in surprise, and the fragments of a snowball could be seen on her face.

Of course, the one who threw it was me.

“Liao Hua, if you’re going to come with us, then don’t be so serious all the time and have fun when we can!” I smirked at her as I said so, and continued to collect snow from the ground to make more projectiles with, feeling the cold chill in my hands as I did so.

Liao Hua sighed and shook her head but she immediately squatted down, with an expression that was utterly devoid of excitement, and began making snowballs with a professional air about her.

It’s not a bad thing to enjoy the pleasures that winter has to afford while there’s snow about.

In any case, we were now in an area not too far from Xingyang city so having a bit of fun now was reasonable.

Xingyang was very big for a county city. Looking about, the scars of war are quite faint and the feeling you get from the surrounding forests is not one of bloodshed but nature.

“Achoo!” At this time, Liao Hua was continuously sneezing and her body was drenched.

I felt very amused for some reason when I saw Liao Hua in this state, and couldn't help but laugh softly at the sight before me

“My lord, why do you look so tired?”

“I was kept awake by the snoring of a certain someone...”

Lu Bu was infuriated but it seems like Wen Yuan doesn't know that she snores.

“Alright, shall I start announcing our presence now?” I asked everyone about me. When I saw that they all nodded, I packed away the feelings I had about what happened at Dongling Pass and got ready to yell out.

Shiku —

“We are...”

“Are the ones below Guan Yu, Marquis of Hanshou Village, and her companions?”

Pu I was forced to swallow back the rest of my words when the city tower yelled out the words I was about to yell out myself.

“May I ask, are you all here to cross the pass?” The ones in the city tower asked.

Eh? What's going on?

“Liao Hua...” I addressed Liao Hua, hoping she could give me an explanation as I was baffled but Liao Hua only tilted her head at me, and looked just as puzzled as I was.

If they had heard rumours about us, then they could have just sent troops out to face us...
Why continue dialogue?

Just as we were all baffled at what was going on, the ones at the city tower continued—

“Lord Guan Yu! Just in time! Your permit has just arrived!”

Yun Chang POV

Even though we hadn't gotten a grasp of what was happening, we had already entered Xingyang city. After rounding a corner, and going past the residential district, we came to the Administrator residence.

To prevent what happened in Luoyang from happening again, we left Gan Qing, Mi Zhen and Hua Tuo with all of our troops elsewhere.

I raised my head and surveyed the Administrator residence. It wasn't very big but it was much better than the few small buildings in Luoyang or the hastily put together brick houses in Sishui Pass.

Whether it was the outskirts or the heart of the city, Xingyang city on a whole felt rather peaceful. While we were on the way in, the passers-by we saw were typically in high spirits and were engaged in various activities and business. Whenever the ordinary citizens met someone they knew, the conversations were polite and the mood was cordial. This sort of atmosphere wouldn't be out of place back when the world was more peaceful.

"Please wait here for a moment while I go in and notify the Administrator." The aide spoke for the first time since he led us in as he saluted and bowed before entering the residence,

We stood at the door with feelings of trepidation, and didn't know what to say so we just waited silently.

"Yun Chang." Wen Yuan poked my back as she looked at me with a slight frown and a baffled look. "What did the soldiers at the tower mean by all that?"

— Your permit has just arrived!

The words we just heard reverberated once more in my ears at Wen Yuan's question. "Could we perhaps have done the necessary paperwork for applying for the permit before?"

Perhaps we just forgot about it.

"No, impossible. I helped my foster father attend to the paperwork for permits when we roamed the land. The procedures are notoriously complicated and aren't the sort of thing you can do in a hurry." Lu Bu shook her head as she frowned at the memories of dealing with permit applications.

"And as Bian Xi said before, you all have caused quite a bit of trouble so there's no way that the permit can be sent over in such a short time." Liao Hua who was diagonally behind added while she rubbed her scar with a calm expression, and sighed at not being able to understand what was going on.

"Apologies for keeping everyone waiting." Just then, the aide came out at which we all hurriedly stopped our discussions and awaited her next instructions.

"Please follow this path to the inner residence. It's only a short journey." The aide gestured and made way for us to enter.

On entering, there was only one path and we followed it and arrived at the main hall.

"You've come." Just as we entered the main hall, a high, aged voice came from inside.

We slowly entered, and found the Administrator, Wang Zhi, sitting in the center of the hall and looking at us. He only looked at us with a stormy expression and neither got up to receive us nor did he invite us to sit.

Wang Zhi looked exactly like an ordinary old man and did not have any imposing aura nor did he feel domineering. As I looked at him, I decided to speak up first, "May I ask..."

"You need not ask anything. Nor do you need to explain the cause and effect of your actions. I can more or less guess as to what happened from the rumours and reports that have come my way." He immediately interrupted me when he heard me begin to speak and then he calmly picked up a piece of silk that was covered in words and threw it toward us.

When I saw this, I hurriedly stepped forward and leapt up to catch the piece of silk.

"That is the permit issued by the Imperial Chancellor. With it, you can cross the pass immediately, and we will not hinder you." Wang Zhi explained just as I landed.

I opened up the piece of silk and inspected it, and found that it was indeed as he said it was. But... Why?

"I had a discussion with Bian Xi, Administrator of Sishui Pass, before, and we decided that we would obstruct you while simultaneously checking with the capital if you did indeed have the express permission of the Imperial Chancellor."

"Bian Xi did that?" I was very surprised at hearing this. Bian Xi did indeed try to hinder us as best as she could, but I didn't think that she was helping us behind all that.

"Administrator Bian Xi is a fair and upright person who will do what her duty requires her to. I just never expected that the cumbersome permit would be delivered so quickly, almost as if it was already prepared beforehand."

Eh? When I heard these strange words from Wang Zhi, I hurriedly looked at the silk in my hands once more and inspected it closely.

In the lower left corner, [Yun Chang's Lost Property] was written. Clearly, this was

something Lord Cao Cao added on.

... Lord Cao Cao, this was something you forgot to give us...

“If the permit hadn’t reached me before you lot came, I would have sent every soldier I have to meet you in battle for my son-in-law Han Fu.” Wang Zhi’s face grimaced when he said this, and the lines of age seemed ever deeper, making his expression look even more hateful.

So there was this relationship huh. Even though it was like that, he still suppressed the fury in his heart...

When I realised this, I hurriedly saluted and bowed, “... We did not consider things too deeply then. I seek your forgiveness for our acts.”

“No need for apologies. This is what it is like in times like these.” He waved his hands melancholically and stood up with great effort.

“If you wish to stay for a few days, then stay. If you don’t, then you can head for the crossing immediately. The crossing is not far, and it shouldn’t be a long journey.” Wang Zhi didn’t pay us any heed after he finished, and left the main hall.

As I looked at his aged figure from the back, a bad taste filled my mouth. I hated myself, and I hated the times we were in.

But in the end, it was just hatred.

(TL: One reason I like this series is because no death is waved away.)

VOLUME 5 CHAPTER 46: DON'T TELL ME THIS IS RIDING AS 3 FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES
(23)

TL: Last chapter of V5. This section has been a little long but it's still fairly good, especially near to the end. Next up is a 2-part Meng De special.

Yun Chang POV

With the permit, our journey thereafter was like heaven compared what we experienced before we received the permit. The treatment we received at all the villages and towns we passed through was unbelievably different. We met Liu Yan in Hua state, but he didn't try and obstruct us in the least. All he did was mention what we did in passing, organise a banquet, and let us rest for a day. We gladly accepted as we were finally able to take a bath and wash our clothes.

And now, the waypoint before the Yellow River Crossing which we had yearned to reach was within sight, as was its gatekeeper general, Qin Qi.

"Un..." Qin Qi went through the permit I passed to him over and over, as though he didn't dare believe what was written on it. After a moment of internal wrangling with himself, he finally sighed and didn't say anything as he gestured for his troops to prepare a boat.

"Thank you, gatekeeper general, for your understanding." I bowed in thanks as I silently cheered in my heart.

"Since you have the permit, I have nothing to say. Moreover, I'm General Xiahou Dun's subordinate general, and I have received orders to let you through before." Qin Qi said with an unsatisfied expression, and pointed at the River before he continued, "The waves are still very choppy, and you can't cross for the time being. I suggest that you rest here for today and leave tomorrow."

I couldn't help but feel suspicious and look at him with fury when he mentioned delaying our journey, and he understood what I was thinking and shook his head helplessly.

“You have served the Imperial Chancellor well and you have your papers as per the Imperial Chancellor’s decree. The Imperial Chancellor herself has also chosen not to pursue the transgressions from before. And so, I really have no reason to bring harm to you so you can rest easy. Please excuse me then.” Qin Qi didn’t bother any further to speak to me when he finished and went off to attend to other matters.

His job as the gatekeeper general of the Yellow River Crossing appears to be far more important than I imagined. He has to manage the irrigation channels and watch out for flooding in this area; and if there were problems with food production here, military expeditions would be greatly delayed.

Looks like we have to stay here for another day before we can cross the river.

Un, looks like we can spend 1 last day with Meng Huo and the Nanman before we go our separate ways.

I turned, and looked at Meng Huo and the Nanman who had reunited with us just a few hours back.

Hu... Hu...

Hua Tuo, Gan Qing and Mi Zhen fell asleep shortly after dinner. I and Wen Yuan carried them into our tent before joining the rest to enjoy some drinks around a fire.

“Blade girl, here!”

“Ah! Thanks!” I gladly accepted the bowl of wine and downed it in 1 gulp.

Haa!! The wine was weak, but also very fragrant. Compared to wine from Zhuo

commandery, Xuchang, and Xu state, the wine here is much sweeter and fiery.

How did that saying go? Something about the night being the world of adults? I didn't get it when I was a child but now, I can fully understand how nice it is to drink at night.

Especially in the chilly winter. Under the moonlight. At this critical juncture in our journey.

Haa... I sighed as I looked at the full moon. A breeze blew and sent back my breath, which smelt strongly of the weak wine's fragrance.

I can finally rest easy after so long. I still have some kinks in my heart to work out but I have resolved to keep advancing. That said, I'm still not quite confident that I'm as capable as Liao Hua believes me to be.

"Blade girl, what are you still sighing about at this time?!" Meng Huo flew over in a drunken stupor and put his arm on my shoulder.

Why are you so drunk so quickly when it's so weak?

"Oi, let go of blade girl at once you bastard. Can't you see that she's tilted her head all the way to the side already?" Lady Zhurong, who sat beside Meng Huo, stood up shakily and walked over and kicked Meng Huo's butt.

After Meng Huo let out several disgusting moans, he let go of me and fell to the ground. Lady Zhurong didn't care and continued to shower physical abuse on Meng Huo. It was a little too hard to watch so I turned away and continued to drink on my own.

"... Oi."

Un?

Lu Bu, who was sitting on my other side, called out to me. I turned and saw Lu Bu raising her bowl to me with a slightly reddened face.

“Ah ah...” I hurriedly brought my bowl towards it when I saw Lu Bu’s gesture.

Ding! A clear sound rang out and some wine spilled out. I held my bowl and downed it in 1 gulp while Lu Bu did the same as well.

Haa... I drank a little too much too quickly, and my throat was stung a little.

“Lord Guan Yu... Are you still thinking about what happened in Luoyang?”

“Eh?” Lu Bu’s sudden words made me feel a little awkward. If I said I didn’t think about it anymore, that would be fake. But many things have happened since then, so I’ve accepted it already.

And so, I filled my bowl and smiled, “That was something that couldn’t have been helped. In any case, to us now, there are some things we can’t avoid doing.”

“... No. To be honest, I could have refrained from killing them back then.”

“Eh?”

“The only reason why I killed them was because I wanted to. That’s all.” Lu Bu continued as she licked the last bit of wine left in her bowl, “Even though I wish to see the world at peace, I still hunger for blood. What a farce.”

“... Lord Lu Bu.” I looked at Lu Bu’s calm expression and extended my bowl, “Feeling lost is a good thing. I too am lost. We just need to keep moving forward, and we will get our answer eventually.”

Ding! As I finished, I clinked bowls with Lu Bu on my own accord and downed the contents.

“Un...” Lu Bu sank into silence and clumsily nodded before she licked the wine in her bowl once more.

I don’t know if I misheard it, but Lu Bu seemed to have uttered “Xuan De” softly under her breath. I smiled, and licked my empty bowl just like she did.

“Oh~ Do you both have any more wine left? The wine jugs over where I came from are all empty~” Wen Yuan, who had been partying with the troops, came over as she licked her bowl as well.

At this scene before me, I couldn’t help but to laugh.

VOLUME 5 EXTRA STORY PART 1

TL: Part 1 of 2. This isn't actually tagged to volume 5, but the content is directly related. First off, this is just a what-if scenario and is non-canon. I repeat, non-canon.

Liu Bei POV

"Hahaha, I didn't think Meng De would fall so easily." Ben Chu cackled as they came back from battle. When I looked at the people behind her, apart from Zhang He, everyone else seemed overjoyed.

"Eh?" I gave a surprised gasp, and didn't believe what Ben Chu said, "What did you say, Ben Chu? Meng De lost?"

At my question, Ben Chu seemed to be even happier as she sat down on the main seat, "That's right. After a few battles, her resources were mostly drained, and in the most recent battle, we were able to deal a decisive blow to her main forces."

As Ben Chu said so, she raised her wine cup which the other officials followed suit as well, "Feng Ji, you were instrumental in this. It's thanks to your supply routes and ambushes."

"Ah, ah... Your retainer was just doing what she is supposed to." Feng Ji was caught off-guard by Ben Chu's praise and hurriedly raised her cup as well, which the surrounding soldiers filled for her.

"That was all thanks to advice from Lord Tian Feng." Ju Shou muttered the truth under her breath with a look of dissatisfaction.

"Ju Shou! Nobody will you think you are dumb if you don't speak!"

“Alright alright, let’s stop fighting now that victory is within our grasp.” Ben Chu smiled stiffly as she drank from her cup, “Tian Feng is unreasonable and unruly at times but she is a loyal retainer and a talent. I’ll let her out when I get back. Come, everyone. Drink!”

As she said so, Ben Chu raised her cup and everyone else followed suit and toasted to Ben Chu. I was included of course, but I wasn’t too happy with this outcome.

Meng De... Is going to lose huh? That ingenious Meng De is going to lose just like that?

When I realised this, I felt like my heart was in turmoil for some inexplicable reason. As I raised my neck and delivered wine down my mouth, I felt that this wine was difficult to swallow.

“Ju Shou, does Meng De have a chance of overturning this situation?” Ben Chu asked when she finished her wine. When Ju Shou heard this, she put down her cup and thought for a moment.

“If Cao Cao attacks Wu Chao, she might have a chance to win. But with the forces Cao Cao has left, I doubt she can defeat the garrison at Wu Chao.”

“I see...” Ben Chu’s smile seemed to diminish somewhat as she nodded.

“My lord, why don’t we bolster the garrison at Wu Chao just in case?”

“No need for that,” Ben Chu shook her head, “We’ll leave it as it is. I doubt she will dare to launch an offensive anyway.”

When she finished, Ben Chu raised her cup once more and downed its contents.

“Hai, Meng De ah Meng De. I’ve finally defeated you.”

I was sitting closer to Ben Chu so even though she muttered this under her breath, I could hear it clearly. I looked at her when I heard this, and saw that she was smiling but she seemed lonely for some reason.

“Xuan De.”

“Ah... Yes.”

Without any warning at all, Ben Chu called out to me.

“After you’re fed and watered, go over to Meng De and ask her to surrender immediately. I’ll let her live if she does so.”

“En?” I was surprised at what I heard, “You want me to go?”

“Yes, it will be easier to do this if it’s you.” Ben Chu said as she raised her eyebrows, and continued in a serious tone, “If she does not surrender, then we will fight to the death tomorrow at noon.”

And so, I came with Zi Long to the Cao army encampment and delivered an introductory letter to the guards at the gate and waited for a moment. When I raised my head to look at the guard posts, I found that there were few guards around.

“Ah, it’s Imperial Uncle.” A voice came from a side gate that opened nearby.

I looked over and saw a girl with flowing hair, wearing plate armour walking over. What made her stand out was a black eyepatch she wore.

"Ah, Yuan Rang. It's been a while." I said as I returned Yuan Rang's salute and bow.

"Yes, it has been a long while since we've met." Yuan Rang said as she got up. She didn't seem to be in good shape. Her only eye had dark circles below. Looks like things are really looking bad.

"Have you both come to see Meng De?"

"Ah, yes." I nodded.

"We came here with a message and we also wanted to see Meng De."

"I see. Hu~" Yuan Rang put her hands on her hips as she sighed with a tired smile.

"Whatever it is, I'm sure Meng De will be happy to see Xuan De. Come in." Yuan Rang turned around and led us in when she finished.

"Do we need to leave our weapons outside?" I asked.

"It's fine," Yuan Rang raised a hand and waved it without turning back, "There's no need for that now."

As we entered, we found that there didn't seem to be many soldiers left. Not only have the tents decreased by a fair amount, even the soldiers who were training were few. Everyone's faces looked dispirited and exhausted.

"Looks like Lord Cao Cao can't make it this time." Zi Long whispered to me, "But this can't be helped. Lord Cao Cao's troops are few compared to Lord Yuan Shao after all."

“Yeah...” I agreed but I felt troubled.

I have to admit that history has changed but I don't know if it's my fault. If it really was indeed my fault, then my guilt would probably multiply.

“We're here,” Yuan Rang stopped outside a tent and turned to me, “Meng De is inside. If you have anything to discuss, just go in and speak with her.”

“Ah, alright. Thanks for bringing us here.” I said and turned to look at Zi Long, “Zi Long, go and rest with Yuan Rang. I'll go in and speak with Meng De.”

“Xuan De, that is...” Zi Long was still on guard as she looked at Yuan Rang with a hand on her sabre.

Yuan Rang's expression is indeed ferocious. When you add an eyepatch to her, it makes it even worse. But at this time, Yuan Rang raised her hand from her sword.

“Relax, we don't have too many troops to set up an ambush.”

“Zi Long, go and rest with Yuan Rang please.” I said as I patted Zi Long's shoulders, “Don't worry, it will be fine here.”

Zi Long frowned as she looked at me, and then she raised her brows and her hands in a sign that she gave up and instructed me to look for her later before leaving with Yuan Rang.

And so, the only one left outside Meng De's tent is just me. As I looked at the white curtains, my emotions began to run wild and I took some deep breaths to calm myself down.

“Meng De, I’m coming in.” I cleared my throat before I said so and parted the curtains.

Gudugudugudu

Just as I entered the tent, I could hear the sound of boiling water. I could also smell the faint aroma of meat. I looked up and saw a bronze cauldron set up on top of a short table.

This is...

“Oh? Xuan De, you came?”

Before I could understand what was going on, I heard Meng De’s relaxed voice. I looked over and saw Meng De sitting at the table. Because of the size of the bronze cauldron and the angle, I didn’t see her at first.

“Ah, I’ve come.” I smiled and wanted to bow and salute her when Meng De waved me over.

“Xuan De, you came at the right time. Come, come, have something to eat with me.” As she said so, Meng De picked out some food onto a plate and placed it beside her.

“Ah... Oh.” I was very puzzled as to why Meng De was having a bronze cauldron at this time but I’m a guest so I didn’t say much and went to sit at the table.

“I’ve been very busy these few days with the frontlines and matters back at Xuchang to the point where I haven’t eaten in days.” Meng De smiled, not forgetting to cook some meat while she continued, “So I got some people to bring me a bronze cauldron from Xuchang to have a good meal for once. Don’t just sit there in a daze, Xuan De. Have some too. It’s from the stall we ate at the last time.”

"Ah, alright." I hurriedly received some meat she took out for me.

"Ah, that's enough. I can't eat too much."

"Eat first before we speak." Meng De said as she picked up her chopsticks and began eating from the food in her bowl.

I too picked up my chopsticks. I looked at the food in my bowl but I really had no appetite. I looked at Meng De and saw that she had dark circles below her eyes and her face and arms were visibly thinner.

My appetite shrank a lot more when I saw this and I really couldn't eat. I merely pretended to send food to my mouth as I waited for Meng De to finish her meal.

Deng

"Haa, I really love this." Meng De said as she put down her bowl and took more meat which she put into the bronze cauldron. At this, I felt that it was time I broached the topic.

"Meng De, I have something to speak with you about."

"Ben Chu wants me to surrender right."

Wu. So she already knew huh. Even though it didn't look like it at all, Meng De already knew why I was here.

"Yes. She said that if you do not surrender, then there will be a battle to end it once and for all tomorrow at noon." I said as I placed Ben Chu's letter beside Meng De and raised my head to look at her, "Will Meng De surrender?"

Gudugudugudu

The bronze cauldron continued to boil, but at this moment, it seemed like everything stood still.

In the next moment, Meng De looked at me and flashed her signature confident smile, “In that case, I’ll meet her on the battlefield.”

VOLUME 5 EXTRA STORY PART 2

TL: Part 2 of 2 of this heartwarming non-canon extra story.

Liu Bei POV

When Meng De finished, I couldn't help but sigh. Honestly, I predicted that Meng De would do this but now that I've heard it myself, I couldn't help but feel sad.

"Won't you reconsider?" For some reason, this came out of my mouth.

"No, considering such things don't fit my character." Meng De said as she picked out another piece of meat from the bronze cauldron, "Ah, it's not cooked yet. I was a little too impatient."

When she finished, Meng De put the meat back in. I didn't know what to say, and lowered my head as I placed a small piece of meat into my mouth. It was cold, but I still chewed on it and swallowed.

"Come to think of it, does Xuan De still remember what I said to you back then?"

"Eh?" My chopsticks which held another piece of meat stopped mid-air as I sank into thought, "Would you be referring to... That?"

I didn't state it clearly but Meng De still nodded. A smile was still plastered on her face but compared to the ones I saw before, her smile now was devoid of any other emotions behind it and was just an ordinary smile.

Even if there were other emotions behind it, it would only be helplessness.

"Back then, I said that the only heroes in the world were you and me. But now, I see that I'm no hero at all." At this, Meng De put down her chopsticks and rubbed her head, "Even if I am a hero, I am a hero that is about to step into her grave anyway."

"..."

No, no such thing.

I very much wanted to say that, but under such circumstances, I did not have the resolve to say it. And so the words remained stuck in my throat as pangs of sorrow assaulted my heart.

"Xuan De, it's fine. I've already prepared myself for something like this a very long time ago. Really, it's fine." Meng De continued to smile as she picked up the letter and threw it into the stove without looking at it, "Ben Chu has both ambition and capability so I was prepared to lose to her."

"... Isn't Meng De bitter at all?" I thought for a moment before I decided to ask this anyway. Meng De was supposed to achieve victory in this battle after all.

"Of course, if I said I wasn't bitter at all, that would be a lie." Meng De said and chuckled, "But the end has been set and I can only accept it. Anyway, Ben Chu's victory will be short-lived."

As she said so, Meng De placed her hand on top of mine.

"Meng De?" I was baffled by this and instinctively tried to pull my hand back but I didn't expect that Meng De had quite a bit of strength and I couldn't do so.

"Xuan De, Yun Chang and the rest are now in Xuchang. When this battle is over, bring your troops to Xuchang and seek her." Meng De withdrew her smile and said very seriously and sincerely, "When you have reunited with your people, find the Son of Heaven and rule the

world as Imperial Uncle. Issue a call to arms to the various feudal lords and take down Yuan Ben Chu.”

“Eh... B, but—”

“Xuan De,” Meng De clapped my shoulders as she bent down and looked straight into my eyes, “Of the 2 heroes who can save the world, you will be the only 1 left after I’m gone. And all I can do to help you is this.”

“But... Meng De!”

Pa *Pa*!

Just then, Meng De clapped loudly twice. My eyes widened, as did Meng De’s. Tears filled her eyes and seemed like they would stream down any moment.

I didn’t know what to say and only waited for Meng De to continue.

“Men! Send our guest out!”

Gudugudugudu

The cauldron was still boiling but I didn’t say anything. The soldiers outside parted the curtains, letting the sunlight shine in. And I had no choice but to walk out.

After I exited, I turned to look at Meng De and saw that she was still sitting behind the bronze cauldron and wasn’t looking at me. I wanted to continue looking but the curtains fell.

“Xuan De, what did Lord Cao Cao say?”

Just then, Yuan Rang and Zi Long came walking over.

I looked at the 2 of them and shook my head lifelessly.

“I see...” Zi Long nodded while Yuan Rang put her hands on her hips.

“When you think about it, this fits Meng De more.” Yuan Rang said as she clapped my shoulders, “Imperial Uncle, don’t beat yourself up about it. Nobody can predict the outcome of battles after all. Imperial Uncle need only do as Meng De said.”

This fits Meng De more huh... I silently recited the words Yuan Rang said and nodded but didn’t say any further.

Thereafter, Zi Long and I exited the encampment. Along the way, we ran into several familiar faces. Not only did they not look at us with hostility, they even bowed deeply and saluted us. Perhaps to them, I am Meng De’s successor.

Honestly, receiving this sort of behaviour is even more unbearable for me.

“The devious hero of the present generation falls huh.” Zi Long said as she sighed when we left the encampment.

The fall of a devious hero. These words aren’t nice but they capture the situation well.

But is it really alright like this? Can history really go on like this?

Even if it can, my heart will be empty. How can the Three Kingdoms be the Three Kingdoms without Cao Cao? There's no point without her.

"Zi Long." I came to a conclusion and called out to Zi Long.

"Un?"

"I have a request for you which I hope that Zi Long can accomplish for me."

"Un? What is it?" Zi Long frowned.

I stood there wordlessly for a long while before I sighed, "Something big."

Meng De POV

Shiku— Hu... It was very cold the next day and the sky was dark. Even though it was still autumn, the cold was so bad I really didn't feel up for battle.

It was so cold that I had to wear an extra layer at the behest of Miao Cai so that the cold plate wouldn't stick to my skin.

This was our last battle already yet she still bothered about that.

"Are our troops in position?" I turned and asked Yuan Rand who was beside me.

At my 2 sides were my most precious and important generals who have joined me in this final battle. I'd already told them they didn't need to come but they still did.

“My lord! Give the order!” Xu Chu who was on my other side pulled on my sleeve. She wasn’t very old but she exuded maturity at this moment. She was jumping up and down while she held her large axe, and didn’t seem sad in the least about this final battle.

Hmph, what am I talking about? There’s nothing sad about this at all.

Though I may end up being separated from my head in this battle, Xuan De still has his dream of saving the world so what regrets do I have?

As I thought so, I pulled out my longsword and pointed it straight ahead. Up ahead was Ben Chu’s troops. From what I can see, it seems like their numbers are 7-8 times of ours,

After a few skirmishes, not only did we narrow the gap, it actually widened. Looks like I really do feel bitter about this.

I was the one facing Ben Chu, yet I couldn’t win.

I then smiled self-deprecatingly, and took a deep breath—

“Charge!”

In the next instant, the thunderous sounds of my troops charging filled my ears. My mind went blank but my body still went through with the motions.

I raised my reins and rode at the head of my troops as we charged at the enemy. My generals were following close behind, and it seemed like they were even trying to overtake me.

Die—

The other side yelled out at the same time as we did. Their drums resounded in beat with the troops' roars, making them seem ever more impressive and fearsome.

This is, this is probably my last battle right.

Yaaaaa— I yelled out as I charged into the enemy with my troops.

In the next instant, both sides clashed. But even from my position in the center, I could see that our troops were surrounded.

Our numerical disadvantage is so severe that even when we meet them head on in the plains, we are almost half-surrounded instantly huh.

Forget it! Yaa!

I threw out all stray thoughts and thought of myself as an ordinary soldier as I raised my blade and killed all surrounding enemies.

However, I was keenly aware that we were losing very quickly on every front even though I was embroiled in battle. Every time I killed an enemy soldier, my troops would get slaughtered. Every time I wanted to advance, my troops would get pushed back.

Only then did I realise how powerless I was.

Ah... Perhaps I should have surrendered then. But I really couldn't say it in front of Xuan De.

At the very end, I wanted Xuan De to see my most confident self.

“My lord’s troops are being surrounded! Pull back our right wing!”

An unknown general yelled out at me. But my hands were full with killing enemies and I really didn’t have the leisure to bother about much else.

“Tell Yuan Rang and Miao Cai to save her!”

“Both generals are embroiled in the chaos and can’t pull out!”

“What about the others?!”

“We’ve lost all contact with them!”

After killing another 3-4 soldiers, I pulled up my horse and turned back only to find that I was deep in enemy territory. Hu Chi, Ren, Hong, and everyone else are all gone.

“Yaa!!”

Neigh~~

Wu!

All of a sudden, a nearby enemy slashed at my horse. I couldn’t dodge in time and fell off my startled horse.

As I fell to the ground, I saw the surrounding enemies closing in for the kill.

Ah, this is where I meet my end huh.

And so, I closed my eyes—

— Meng De, watch out!

In the next instant, I hit the ground and pain came from my head. I felt dizzy as well and realised that I wasn't dead yet.

Dang *Dang*! *Ding*!

I slowly opened my eyes as the sound of clashing weapons filled my ears to see someone standing before me. This person wasn't tall nor was he well-built. His figure was also unsteady but at this time, he seemed bigger than anything.

"Meng De, are you alright!"

That person yelled at me, and I found his voice very familiar. I blinked away the tears from pain and only then did I recognise who he was. Apart from some blood on his face and a set of plate armour, he didn't differ much from when we met yesterday.

This person was someone very familiar to me.

"Xuan De!" I cried out in surprise, "Why are you here!"

I was very surprised and shocked at seeing the person before me, and couldn't believe what

I was seeing. Not only that, Xuan De was actually smiling at me.

“Meng De never thought I’d be here, right!” He smiled as he continued to cut down the surrounding troops, “I ordered Zi Long to bring my troops to Xuchang, and gave my position of Imperial Uncle to Yun Chang so she can act in my place.”

“What are you talking about!!” I yelled at Xuan De as rage filled my heart, “What have you come here for! What good will you coming to my side do?! You have more important duties to fulfill!”

“So Meng De can make this sort of expression huh.”

Eh?

I was throwing my temper at him but he still smiled at me.

“But... Why?” I said as I looked at him with a frown. “Why, have you come here to find me?”

Hmph.

Swords, glaives and halberds filled my field of vision but all I could see was Xuan De’s dazzling smile.

And in his smile, I saw myself.

“Because you’re Meng De.”

!

When I heard Xuan De's words, I couldn't help but to take a deep breath. His words didn't make sense and I didn't know what he was trying to convey but for some reason, I felt very emotional. As I looked at Xuan De before me, tears began to fill my eyes.

"Meng De! Now isn't the time to be sitting around." Xuan De continued. The surrounding troops were increasing in number and it seems like Xuan De can't hold them off for long.

... Xuan De you idiot.

"Eh? Meng De, did you say something?"

"No, nothing." My heartstrings tightened and I leapt to my feet and stood beside Xuan De as I wielded my weapon.

Looks like we're completely surrounded.

"Xuan De, since you're already here, then be prepared to die with me!"

"I came here with that very intention!"

... Hmph.

In that case—

"Xuan De! Let's charge!"

“Oh!”

...

Now that I think about it, this is probably the first time, and also the last, that I’m fighting by Xuan De’s side.

Sometimes I wonder, what would it be if Xuan De and I were just ordinary peasants in a countryside village?

But, we can’t help ourselves.

All we can do, is hope that we can meet in the next life.

(TL: Okay guys, sorry for trolling. But really, this is the last part.)

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